

Let's talk

Are you worried about the mental health of an older person you know?

This leaflet is for anyone who would like to learn more about depression in later life and how to support an older person you may be worried about.



Introduction

Feeling down or depressed from time to time is normal, but if these feelings last for some time or start to affect everyday life, it can be a sign of depression.

Older people are at increased risk of becoming depressed

Events in later life, including social isolation, retirement, loss of mobility, health issues and bereavement, can increase the risk of depression.

Someone you know could be affected - your parent, grandparent, friend, or neighbour. **Depression can happen to anyone.**





Older people can be reluctant to talk about their feelings

Older people are **less likely to spot the signs** of depression in themselves and may not want to discuss their mental health, even with a healthcare professional.

Having a conversation is important

Diagnosing depression is the first step to getting the right help. There are treatments available which can help

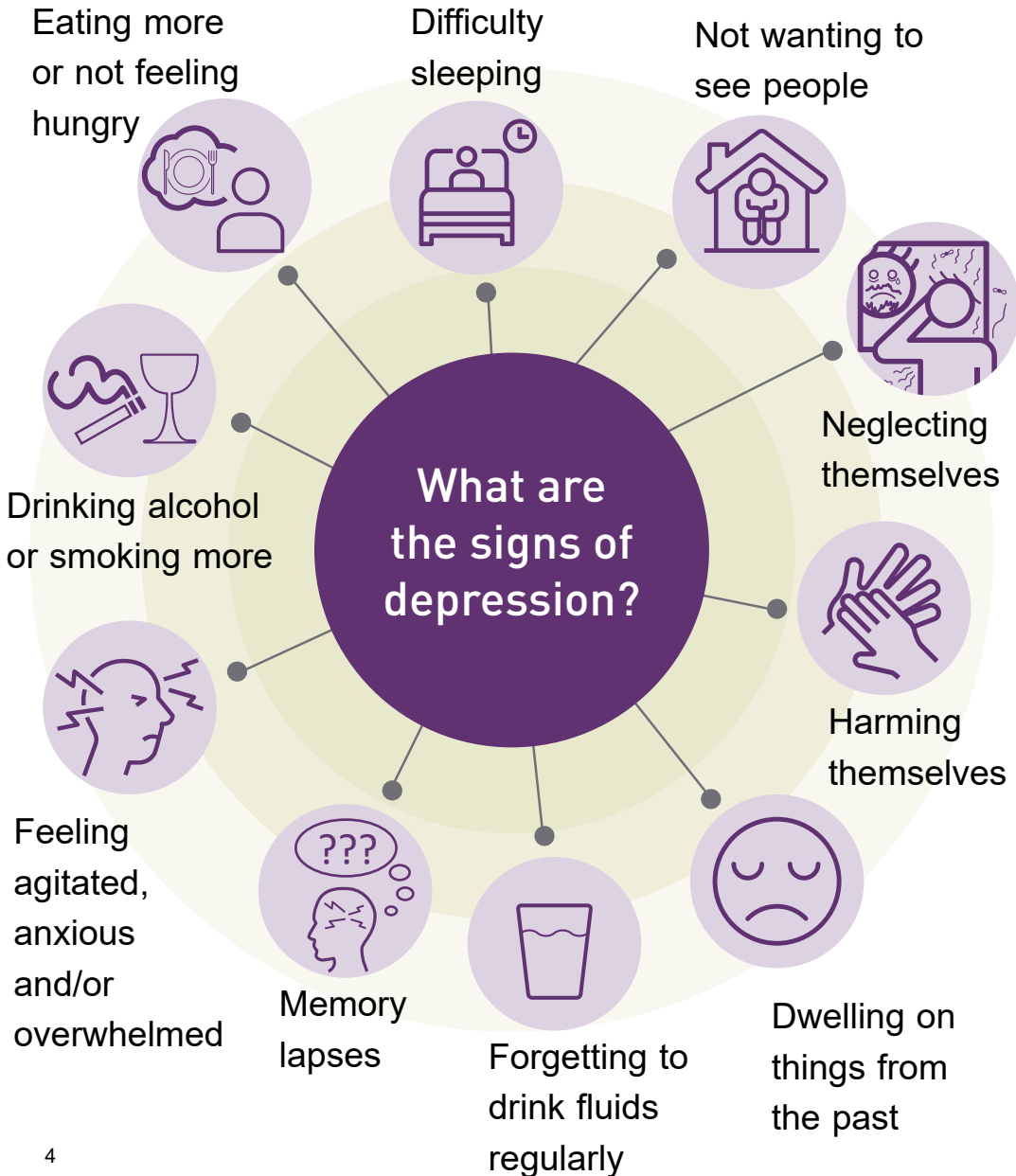
including talking therapy and medication.

Checking-in with someone you are worried about can help them get the support they need.

You might find it difficult to have that conversation or know where to start. This leaflet provides you with the tips and conversation starters you need. It includes information on how people can get help.

Let's talk

If someone is depressed, you may notice changes in their behaviour. There are some common signs, but not everyone will have all of these - they may show some, a few, or none.



In older people, signs of depression can also include:

- Empty fridges and cupboards
- Neglected appearance
- Poor hygiene
- Little joy in receiving visitors



A conversation guide

How to talk to an older person about mental health and depression

Here are some tips to help you approach a conversation.

ALEC as an easy way to structure the conversation.

1. Ask
2. Listen
3. Encourage action
4. Check-in

Please read on

Ask

Choose the right environment.

“Where would you like to talk?”

Ask open questions and give time for a response.

“How are you **today**?”

“I've noticed you haven't seemed yourself **lately**, how are you feeling?”

“What's been happening?”

Try talking about things they care about to get a sense of how they are doing.

“How are things with your family/hobby/pet going?”

Ask if they've felt like this before.

“Did you manage to change the way you've felt in the past? What helped?”

If they are having suicidal thoughts, **DO** open up a conversation, **DO** ask their reasons for wanting to die and explore with them their reasons for living. You should also help them seek urgent help – please refer to the **Urgent Help** box on page 11.

Listen

DO give your full attention and listen without judgement.

Tell them you are there to listen.

DO reflect back and clarify.

Show you're listening by repeating their words back to them. If something isn't clear, ask them to explain. Do not put words in their mouth.

DO allow time and space for the conversation

Offer to make a drink and sit down to talk. After the conversation offer to return again.

DON'T assume you know all the answers.

If you don't know what to say, you don't need to find an answer, or even understand their feelings.

Listening will let them know you care.

DON'T minimise.

Don't tell them to 'cheer up', 'pull themselves together', or be grateful for their life.

DON'T compare with other situations (including your own).

It could turn into you telling your story rather than listening to them.

DON'T diagnose.

You are not in a position to diagnose a mental illness, even if you've gone through something similar yourself.

DON'T interrupt or rush the conversation.

Allow for silence even though it might feel awkward at times.

Encourage action

DO ask.

“What do you think would help?”

Give information rather than advice.

DO address myths.

If they say “There is nothing that can help me feel better”, or “I should stop complaining”, tell them there are treatments available which can help.

DO encourage them to seek help that they are comfortable with.

This can be a doctor, a counsellor, or a charity such as Samaritans.

Ask them if they know any local community groups that they could join. You can give them additional information from this leaflet.

DO gently encourage them to do some self-care.

By staying physically active, eating a healthy diet, doing things they enjoy.



DON'T try to find an easy fix.

Don't give advice as your first response, listen, give time and space to understand their individual needs from their perspective and what will work best for them.

Check-in

DO make sure someone is with them if they are in immediate danger (please refer to the **Urgent Help** box on page 11).

DO discuss if they would like a follow-up call or to reach out to other people.

DO stay in touch by messaging, phoning or meeting up.

DO try to be patient – progress may take time.

DO get support for yourself.

DO build trust.

- Building a relationship and nurturing trust can be a slow process. It's important to be genuine, honest, consistent, and always maintain confidentiality.
- Follow up any commitments that you agree to and maintain clear communication.



Sources of help

GP

GPs are the main route to support. A family member or friend can attend the appointment with the person seeking help.



Free confidential talking therapy and practical support for adults with common mental health problems including low mood and depression

Please speak to your GP or use the contact details below to self-refer via the telephone or internet.

Hertfordshire

Call: 0800 6444101

Visit: www.hpft-iapt.nhs.uk

West Essex

Call: 0333 015 2966

Text: 'YOU' to 88802

Visit:

www.vitahealthgroup.co.uk



Urgent help

If the person expresses suicidal feelings or self-harms, it is important to assess their risk.

You can ask these basic questions:

1. Are you thinking about taking your life?
2. Do you have a plan?
3. Have you felt like this before?
If yes, what helped then?

If they answer yes to these questions immediately contact **NHS 111, select Option 2** for medical support

You can also contact Samaritans on 116 123 for confidential 24-hour support.



Essex Wellbeing Service

A network of community organisations that can provide health and wellbeing support.

Call: 0300 303 9988

Visit: www.essexwellbeingservice.co.uk



Essex
Wellbeing Service

HertsHelp

Is able to direct you to a network of community organisations who can listen and help people to get health and wellbeing support.

Call: 0300 123 4044

Visit: www.hertshelp.net



Healthy Hubs Hertfordshire

A free one-stop shop for health and wellbeing information, advice and support.

Visit: www.healthyhubs.org.uk

