

Dear Sipiwe

Feeling sad is, unfortunately, a normal part of everybody's life. Many young people have difficult lives because of poverty and violence. Even those with comfortable lives can feel unhappy.

As a teenager, your body is going through huge chemical changes and these can make your moods change from being happy to feeling sad and then back again – all in just a few hours! Perhaps some of your friends are feeling just like you – tell them about your problem and they'll feel freer to talk too.

Some girls and women feel depressed before their monthly period – this is pre-menstrual tension (PMT). Ask a health worker or older woman about remedies.

There are practical things you can do to help deal with depression. Try not to pretend. It's better to share your feelings – talk to friends and family. Regular exercise helps too. Get enough sleep and eat healthy food. Try to relax and do things you enjoy like singing or reading. And let yourself cry – it can make you feel better.

If none of these things work, you need proper medical help and counselling.

Good luck. You're brave to ask for help, and I'm sure you can deal bravely with this depression too.

Auntie Stella

ACTION POINTS

- In the middle of a big page, draw a sad person. Around the person, draw all the things that can help to make them feel better. Draw the most helpful things near the person, and the others further away.
- Tell your group about any times you've felt depressed, confused or irritable recently. Say if there was a reason for the sadness and how it went away.
- Decide on a time each week when you will tell each other how your week has been and how you're feeling – and work out how you can help each other and where else you can go for help. (If you're already meeting regularly, start your meeting with this activity.)
- If you exercise less than three times a week, arrange with your friend to do something you enjoy – like walking or running.
- Helping others is another way of making you feel good. Decide on two activities you want to do (like volunteering to help people at your church or helping younger children with their homework). Make a plan to do these activities. Afterwards discuss how it made you feel.

