

# Clinical Toolkit

## Clinical Tips: Context for Depressive Symptoms in Young People

When young people are experiencing distress or depressive symptoms, there may be explanations other than depression, such as grief and loss, trauma or distressing life events, or difficulties in expressing and managing anger, sadness, fear and shame.

The assessment process involves helping young people to make sense of their experience of normal feelings and reactions, as well as identifying the presence and assessing the severity of symptoms and their impact on functioning.

**It is essential to consider the context in which symptoms are presenting.**

Considerations include:

- **age and stage of development** – e.g. how do the symptoms fit with what would be considered developmentally appropriate?
- **psychosocial stressors** – e.g. school, family functioning, peer relationships, romantic relationships
- **cultural context** – e.g. behaviours that can be taken to be signs of a depressive episode (being shy, not interacting, or being softly spoken) may actually reflect discomfort at being in a clinical setting or language difficulties
- **substance use**