

New therapy focus for depression in young people

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Credit: University of York

A therapy which focuses on finding ways to engage in activities that generate positive emotions and combat negative ones could be an effective way of treating young people with depression, researchers at the University of York say.

About 510,000 (11.5 per cent) of [young people](#) aged between 11 and 16 years have a [mental disorder](#) within the UK. A 2006 review found that 5.7 per cent of young people in mid to late-adolescence had [depression](#) over a one year period.

Depression is already the leading cause of disability in young people and by 2030 will be the leading cause of disease burden globally.

However, despite [high rates](#) of depressive disorders, researchers say few young people seek help. This reluctance to seek help may be influenced by a number of factors, including stigma, accessibility and unwillingness to engage one-to-one with a therapist.

New evidence suggests that behavioural activation therapy (BA), a talking therapy focused on increasing adaptive/pleasurable activities could be an effective way of helping young people overcome low mood and depression.

Lucy Tindall, a PHD student in the Department of Health Sciences at the University of York reviewed more than 5,000 studies to find ones that had examined BA therapy in young people aged 11 – 16; 10 studies were deemed relevant.

She said: "The preliminary evidence suggests BA could help young people suffering depression but because there are so few studies in the area more research is needed."

Computerised therapy

Ms Tindall said delivering BA through "computerised therapy" could be an effective way of helping young people who are reluctant to see help otherwise.

"We are looking to develop a BA programme that is computerised. We have got large numbers of young people with depression in the UK but don't always have the necessary support available to help them.

"Often young people don't want to sit down face-to-face with a therapist, they find it quite daunting and you end up with a lot of missed appointments.

"Young people are increasingly tech savvy and a computerised BA [therapy](#) could be an effective way of reaching young people who need help."

Researchers say the next step is to develop a computerised BA program and pilot it with young [people](#) experiencing depression.

The study is published in the journal *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*.

More information: Lucy Tindall et al. Is behavioural activation effective in the treatment of depression in young people? A systematic review and meta-analysis, *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice* (2017). [DOI: 10.1111/papt.12121](https://doi.org/10.1111/papt.12121)

Provided by University of York

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