HOW WE CAN HELP OUR CHILDREN WHEN THEY FEEL DOWN
(Adapted from an article by Heidi Kopel Clinical Psychologist)

If our child’s feelings of sadness and depression continue for more than two weeks we should begin to get concerned but if they continue for a whole school term then you need to seek professional help.

Symptoms of a depressive illness:
- sleep may become disturbed – waking frequently or staying up late, sleeping during the day, difficult getting up in morning
- weight and appetite changes – noticeable loss or weight gain, loss of interest in food or eating a lot to self-comfort
- loss of normal activity levels – becoming lethargic
- loss of enjoyment in activities that the child once enjoyed – becoming less involved becomes the pattern of shutting down
- difficulty with concentration and remembering
- thoughts of self harm

What we can do as parents:
Because our children are hurting during this time we may experience overwhelming feelings of frustration, sadness and helplessness. We must manage our reactions to our child and also take care of ourselves while taking care of our child.
- Be available to listen and offer help – spend time with them, offer to assist them finding professionals who can help them.
- Find out what we don’t know – ask for information from the School Counsellor or your local Doctor. Seek answers for your child’s behaviour.
- Seek help from a Doctor or Psychologist but trust ourselves to do the best for our child – as a family share ideas, activities, feelings so problems can be shared. This highlights the love and support the family provides. One solution will not be the answer. If we can show encouragement, slow down the criticism and our reactions in general, this helps us accept our children are all different.
- Encourage our children to
  (a) talk and express their feelings
  (b) spend time with supportive friends
  (c) share activities with others they trust
  (d) join in activities they enjoy
  (e) non-competitive exercise – walk together, go to the gym, ride a horse
(f) learn new ways to relax - watch a funny movie, pat the dog, go for a walk, do yoga, listen to a relaxation tape
- Plan a future event together
- Accept that there will be setbacks, it takes time and lots of concentrated energy for things to get better. Depression is usually a short lived condition in children if it is recognized and helped. When it is more entrenched depression will almost always respond to professional treatment.

The most important part of recognizing depression is that depression can happen to our children and keep the channels of communication open.

Websites that may be helpful:
www.reachout.com.au
www.beyondblue.org.au
www.depressionet.com.au
www.blackdoginstitute.org.au

Depression is common, so if you are concerned make an appointment to speak to your local Doctor.