



Young people's
mental health services

We're in this **together**

Looking after a young
person's mental health

A toolkit for caregivers

Growing up **happy**

Watching your children grow up is incredible and rewarding.

Young people experience lots of physical and mental changes as they get older. It isn't always plain sailing, but it can be especially tough if your child is struggling with their mental health. It can be hard to know how to help and where to turn to for support, but **you aren't alone**.

Who this toolkit is for

You might be a parent, caregiver, guardian or family member.

You might be worried about a young person's mental health or looking to better support your children's wellbeing.

You'll find lots of guidance here for your loved one, and yourself.

Remember. No mental health problem is worse than another, and they're not a sign of weakness.

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Look out for helpful tools and resources. Click to read, watch, listen or download.



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What can affect a young person's mental health?

Lots of different experiences in a young person's life can have an impact on their mental health. Sometimes, there isn't a clear reason why somebody might not be feeling themselves.



**Trauma
and abuse**

**Growing
up**

**The arrival of
a new sibling**

**Exams
or other
pressures
at school**

**Parents
who separate
or divorce**

**Life changes
such as
moving house
or school**

Bullying

**Friendship
groups and
relationships**

Bereavement

Are some people more prone to mental health problems than others?

There can be lots of complex factors that affect our mental health. If someone in your family has a mental health condition, you might be worried that your child will develop the same condition. We don't fully understand what causes somebody to develop a mental health condition. Some research suggests that conditions can sometimes run in families, but this doesn't mean that you or your child are going to become unwell.

Spotting the signs that something isn't right

Lots of children and young people will go through tough times with how they think and feel. Sometimes things get better on their own, but other times, they might need professional help.

It isn't always easy to tell if something's wrong, but there are signs to look out for:

- changes in behaviour at home or school
- having trouble sleeping a lot
- keeping to themselves more
- not wanting to do things they usually like
- hurting themselves or not taking care of themselves

All children are different, but you know your children better than anyone.

[This resource from MindED](#) can help you decide if a worry should be more of a concern.



[Spotting the signs of poor mental health in children >](#)



Ways to support a young person's mental health

Talk to your child

One of the most important things you can do is listen to your child, but starting a conversation about their feelings can sometimes be difficult. Activities like the chatter box game below can help your child feel more comfortable talking about their emotions.

 [Download chatter box cards >](#)

 [How to talk about feelings >](#)

Track how they're feeling

Keeping a diary of your child's mood and behaviour will help you to keep a note of what happens when they start to struggle. Noting down what they were doing, what time of the day it was and how the situation was de-escalated can help you identify their triggers.

 [Download a mood tracking diary >](#)

Make time for each other

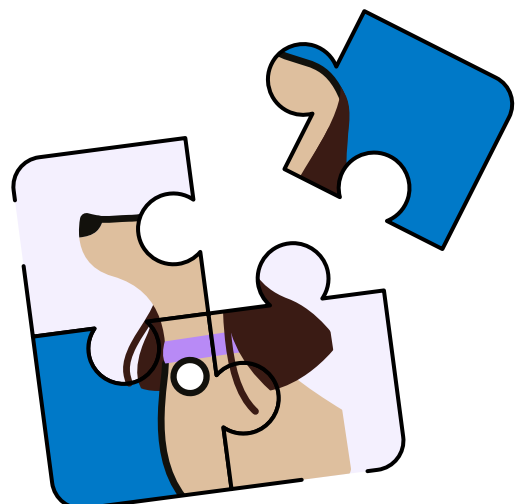
Spend quality time together. A child who's alone or bored may not know how to express their feelings or understand what's happening to them.

Build a comfort kit

A comfort kit is a box filled with items that bring comfort to your child during times of increased emotion. Items to put in the box might include:

- colouring books
- jigsaws
- pictures
- fidget toys
- cuddly toys
- comforting smells

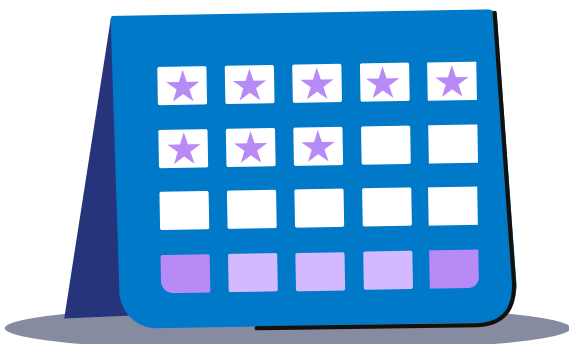
 [How to build a comfort kit >](#)



Try a thought box

A worry box is a great way to discuss your child's worries in a more informal way. Ask your child to write down or draw any worries they may have. Ask them to share these with you before placing them into a container. This strategy gives your child a physical way of letting go of their worries. It can also help them to understand that thoughts are just thoughts and can't physically harm them.

A positive box is a good way to encourage your child to think positively about their achievements that day. Things to think about and write down could be something they enjoyed doing at school or perhaps something they were proud of accomplishing.



Use a reward chart

A reward chart can help your child to have a clear understanding of what is expected of them during the day and what they will receive for completing these things.

Splitting the day into three periods can help their tasks or goals feel more manageable. It will also give them plenty of time to achieve their goals, even if they have a difficult time during one of the periods.

At each stage, give your child the chance to make their own choices on which activity they want to complete, or which one they wish to complete first. This can encourage them to participate, giving them a sense of control. It can also help them to learn the impact of positive choice making.

When your child completes one of their tasks, rewarding them is a way of delivering positive reinforcement. The intention is to motivate your child to want to achieve and engage with the plan. You might want to reward them with extra screen time or perhaps their favourite snack.

Don't be afraid to ask for help

If you're really concerned about your child, don't be afraid to seek expert help. You'll find lots of support at the back of this toolkit.

Explore grounding techniques together

Grounding techniques can help your child to feel in control of their emotions.

You can use ice if your child starts to experience difficult thoughts and feelings. By holding a couple of plastic ice cubes in their hands, it can help their mind focus on the cold sensation rather than the upsetting thoughts.

Other grounding techniques your child can use are:

- telling themselves they're safe and that these feelings will pass
- acknowledging two things they can **see** around them
- acknowledging two things they can **touch**
- acknowledging one thing they can **hear**
- acknowledging one thing they can **smell**

You can ask your child to think about other things, such as what else can they associate with cold or what animals might they find in the sea.

A game of eye spy can also be a fun way of reconnecting with their environment.



Types of conditions

Anxiety

We all feel anxious at times, including children and young people. Anxiety is a feeling of fear, unease or worry about something that may happen in the future. Lots of things can make your child feel anxious, such as pressures at school or big changes in their life, like moving house.

Types of anxiety

Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)

This is when somebody has had worries for more than six months. With GAD, a child might be anxious about many different things.

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)

OCD is when someone has unwanted thoughts and feels the need to do certain actions repeatedly to make themselves feel better.

Panic disorder

If a person has a panic disorder, they'll get sudden intense periods of fear. These episodes are called panic attacks. Not everyone who gets panic attacks has panic disorder.

Social anxiety

If your child has social anxiety, they might feel anxious about meeting and talking to people, especially outside of family. They may be very worried about what they do or say and how others think of them. This could mean they find it difficult to join in with classroom activities, attend parties or speak in front of their class.

Symptoms of anxiety

A young child with anxiety may have these symptoms:

- nightmares
- clinginess
- headaches or tummy aches
- eating or sleeping problems
- teenagers and young people may also have problems concentrating, negative thoughts, and stop wanting to see friends or go to school.



How is anxiety treated?

Talking therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) are often an effective way of treating anxiety.

A GP might prescribe medication, depending on how severe your child's symptoms are.

What are some coping skills for anxiety?

Anxiety is common in young people. But you can support them by listening to their worries and letting them know you're there to help. You could suggest:

- talking to someone they trust about how they're feeling when they're anxious
- using techniques to manage worries, such as a worry tree or worry jar
- practicing mindfulness
- trying breathing exercises to feel calmer
- If things don't get better or you're worried, speak to your GP.

More information

Visit our information pages for everything you need to know about anxiety.



[All about anxiety >](#)



[Supporting your teen with anxiety >](#)



[Types of childhood anxiety >](#)



[Supporting someone with OCD >](#)

Ask the expert

Dr Michelle McKenner,
a clinical psychologist, answers
all your questions on anxiety.



[Watch with JAAQ >](#)



Types of conditions

Depression

Depression affects young people too. Whilst mood changes are a normal part of a young person's life, when these are frequent, or extreme, they might suggest something else is going on.

Symptoms of depression

One of the main differences between adult and teenage depression is that teenagers may become very sensitive to criticism and appear more irritable than sad.

With depression, your teenager may:

- have trouble falling asleep or sleeping more than usual
- struggle with concentration and behaviour at school
- no longer enjoy things they used to
- become withdrawn socially
- be continually low in mood
- misuse alcohol or drugs
- overuse their phone
- over or under eat



How is depression diagnosed?

A doctor or mental health professional will usually use a symptoms questionnaire. This will help to show how often your teen is having depressive symptoms, and how severe they might be.

How is depression treated?

Depression is usually treated by talking therapies, and/or medication. Often, a GP will recommend both.



More information

Visit our information pages for everything you need to know about depression.



[All about depression >](#)



[Signs of depression in young people >](#)



[What's the difference between depression and anxiety? >](#)

Ask the expert

Carly Francis, a cognitive behavioural psychotherapist, answers all your questions on depression.



[Watch with JAAQ >](#)

Types of conditions

Eating disorders

Most children have their likes and dislikes when it comes to food. But if a young person has an eating disorder, they might have upsetting thoughts or emotions that lead them to control what they eat or what they weigh as a way of coping.

Types of eating disorders

Bulimia

Someone with bulimia will eat a lot of food in a short space of time (called binge-eating) and then purge what they've eaten from their body to try and stop themselves gaining weight. They might make themselves sick, use medication, or exercise excessively following a binge.

Anorexia

People with anorexia will limit how much they eat and drink to try and keep their weight as low as possible. They might do this through dieting, fasting, exercising a lot, or binge eating and then purging. They will often have a distorted view of their body, seeing themselves as heavier or bigger than what they are, even if they're underweight.

Binge-eating disorder (BED)

BED causes a person to eat a lot of food very quickly. Unlike bulimia, someone with BED won't usually try and get rid of the food from their body. BED can be incredibly distressing and is not the same as over-indulging or choosing to eat a lot of food.

Avoidance/restrictive food intake (ARFID)

With ARFID, a person will avoid certain foods which means they don't get all the nutrients their body needs. ARFID should not be dismissed as fussy eating. People with ARFID might avoid certain foods because of their texture, appearance, taste or smell. They might also have had a bad experience with food, such as choking or being sick which causes them to restrict what they eat.

Symptoms of an eating disorder

Eating disorders are mental health conditions, so it isn't always easy to know what's going on. Changes in a child's or young person's behaviour might include:

- hiding food
- avoiding food or eating occasions
- not having much of an appetite
- exercising more than usual
- leaving the dinner table quickly
- avoiding eating in front of others
- only eating certain foods
- using the bathroom directly after meals
- not feeling able to eat even though they want to
- constantly thinking about food, weight, or body shape

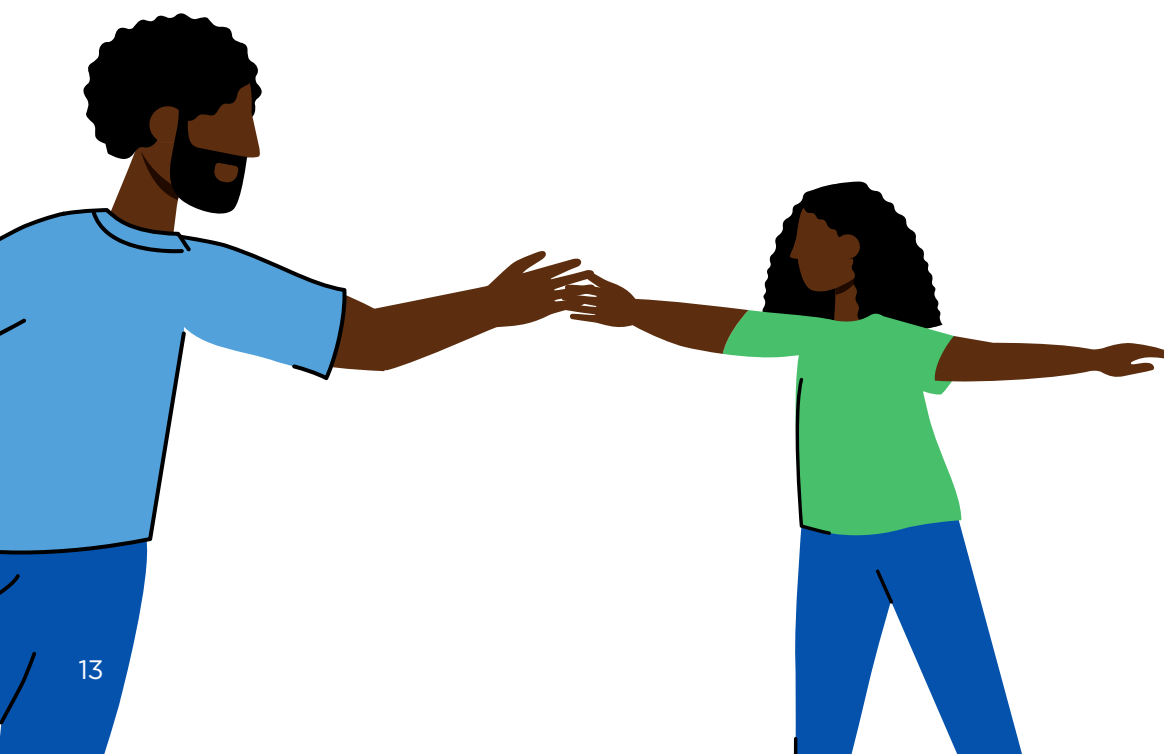
How are eating disorders diagnosed?

The first step to getting help is to see your GP. Your GP will be able to refer your child to specialist help if needed. You'll find lots of support at the back of this toolkit.

Like many mental health conditions, people with eating disorders can find it hard to see that something is wrong. They might not feel they need help or treatment and might not want to see a GP. Talk with your child and acknowledge that they aren't to blame. Tell them you're concerned and let them know you're there to listen and support.



Download this resource from the charity Beat, to help support conversations with your GP >





How are eating disorders treated?

Treatment for all eating disorders will involve helping your child to eat a regular, balanced diet.

They might see different types of specialists such as nurses, doctors, dietitians and psychologists.

When they're physically better, treatment will focus on the psychological effects of the illness to help them understand their feelings. This can include talking therapies, either as a family or individually.

A GP might also prescribe them medication.

More information

Visit our information pages for everything you need to know about eating disorders and eating difficulties.



[All about eating disorders >](#)



[Children and eating difficulties >](#)



[How to tell if your child has an eating difficulty >](#)

Ask the expert

Dasha Nicholls, a child and adolescent psychiatrist, answers all your questions on eating disorders.



[Watch with JAAQ >](#)

What other issues might children struggle with?

Bereavement

Losing a loved one is the hardest process most of us will experience. It can be particularly tough helping a child to cope with the death of someone they love when you are dealing with your own grief.

How a child experiences and expresses grief can depend on their age and their understanding. There's lots of support out there to help both of you through this difficult time.

 [Guide to grief and loss from Young Minds >](#)

 [How grief may affect children from Marie Curie >](#)

Staying safe online

By the age of 15, most children use social media to interact with others. Whether it's TikTok, Snapchat or Instagram, these apps can be a fun way to bond with friends and learn about the world around them. We've put together some guidance on how you can help your child develop good habits and a healthy relationship with social media, so they can stay safe online.

 [Social media and your child >](#)

Burnout

Stress is normal and can be important for our motivation, but burnout is the result of long-term stress. Young people experience burnout just as adults do. Whilst an adult might experience burnout from a stressful job, a young person might struggle with pressures at school, friendship groups, or worry about the outside world. They might get to a point where they feel overwhelmed or emotionally drained. It's important to recognise the signs of burnout so you can support your child if they're struggling.

 [Inside Health series on burnout in teenagers >](#)



Self-harm

It can be extremely upsetting to think about your child harming themselves. There are lots of reasons why someone might want to hurt themselves. Sometimes, it's a way for somebody to manage difficult feelings, but it shouldn't be ignored. If you think your child might be self harming, stay calm and non-judgemental.

[**This guide to self-harm from Young Minds**](#) has everything you need to support a child through self-harm.

Feelings



[Parent's guide to feelings of loneliness in young people >](#)



[Helping your child with feelings of anger >](#)



Supporting **siblings**

Supporting siblings of children with mental health challenges can be a delicate balance, but your love and understanding will make a world of difference. It's natural to worry about giving more attention to one child, but remember, open communication is key.

Involve them in the care process

Remind them that their role is really important to their brother or sister's wellbeing.

Educate them

Talk to them about their brother or sister's condition in a way they'll understand. This can foster empathy and reduce feelings of resentment.

Make special time for each child

No matter how small, so they feel valued and heard.

Spend time together as a family

Encourage activities that allow for shared positive experiences, and celebrate each child's strengths and accomplishments.

Seek support if needed

Family therapy or support groups can provide a safe space for siblings to express their feelings and learn coping strategies. Remember, you're doing your best and that's more than enough.



Taking care of **yourself**

As a parent or caregiver, your children come first. But taking a moment for yourself and reflecting on how **you** are feeling can help to role-model good mental health.

Do

- ask for help from a professional and stay connected with loved ones.
- something you enjoy once in a while to give yourself a break.
- spend quality time with your child and try to stay positive.
- speak to your employer about getting support at work, if things are getting on top of you.

Don't

- be hard on yourself. You're doing everything you can.
- struggle alone. There's always a way somebody can help.
- be afraid to make tough decisions. Your child needs to know you're there to keep them safe.



Listen to our podcasts

The Parent Chat podcast aims to highlight the importance of parents talking about their worries and supporting each other for their own personal wellbeing. To listen, click the name of the podcast below.

[Episode 1 - Stresses of the modern parent](#)

[Episode 2 - Mental health](#)



Watch how you can get support at work with JAAQ >




Get support

If you need help, we'll get you to the right place. If you have health cover with us, you can contact us using your usual Bupa helpline or through your My Bupa app.

Family Mental HealthLine

If you have health cover with us and are worried about the emotional wellbeing of your child, speak to one of our mental health nurses. They'll listen and give you clear guidance on what to do next. Using our Family Mental HealthLine won't affect your benefits or excess.

You can also call 111 to speak to an NHS nurse or mental health nurse. Always call 999 if somebody's life is at risk or you don't feel you like you can keep somebody safe.

 [Visit our young people's mental health page >](#)

There are lots of really helpful charities you can turn to for support:



[Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition](#)



[Heads Together](#)



[Rethink Mental Health](#)



[Mind](#)



[Young Minds](#)

Fast treatment,

If you have health cover with us, a child on your policy and mental health benefits in place, mental health benefits in place, we'll aim to provide treatment for your child's mental health problem within 10 days. Get help by speaking to a GP remotely in the My Bupa app.

 [Find out more about our young people's mental health service >](#)

Finder

Browse our directory of Bupa-recognised consultants, psychologists, therapists, counsellors and other professionals. If you don't have health cover with us, you can still choose from our recognised consultants, you'll just need to pay independently.

Accessing NHS child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS)

You'll often need to speak to your GP first to get a referral to your local CAMHS. You can also ask your child's school to make a referral. Speak to your child's pastoral team or special educational needs coordinator (SENCO).

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