

Young people, emotions and wellbeing




Young people deal with many changes as they go through adolescence. Changes in the brain and hormones result in changes to their body as well as how they think, feel and behave. They can experience lots of emotions which can change quickly.

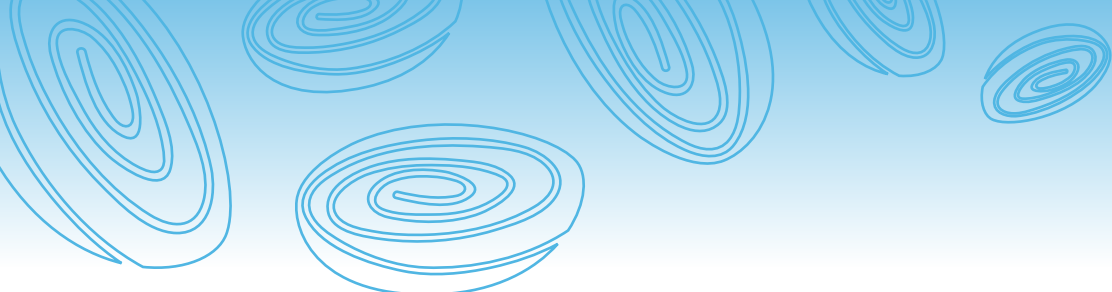
This can be a challenging time for everyone. There may be ups and downs, periods of low mood, ongoing anxiety or sadness. For some young people it can significantly impact daily life. Studies show support from parents/caregivers is a big factor in helping them cope. Looking after your own health and wellbeing will also help you support your young person.

Building good mental health habits

Teaching children and young people to prioritise their wellbeing is really important. Developing healthy habits provides a solid foundation for positive mental health into the future. You can help by supporting them to:

- sleep well. Pre-teens need 9-11 hours sleep and teenagers 8-10 hours. Turn off screens one hour before bedtime, have a bedtime routine, minimise caffeine and discourage daytime napping
- eat healthily - a balanced diet boosts mood and energy
- stay active - encourage physical activity they enjoy, even in small amounts. It reduces stress, improves mood and builds resilience
- keep up their interests - both existing ones and new challenges, eg volunteering, hobbies or clubs. Creative activities can boost confidence and a sense of belonging

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- set attainable goals, eg saving money to buy something they want or improving their grades at school. Achieving even small goals builds confidence
 - stay connected to others, eg family, friends, pets
 - take time each day to appreciate something good in their life
 - build resilience and deal more positively with mistakes and setbacks, eg 'I've tried my best' or 'I'll keep practising and try again'. Encourage them to speak to themselves as kindly as they would to a friend in the same situation
 - accept life's ups and downs. Teach them that everyone faces challenges and encourage healthy coping skills, eg listening to music, visiting friends, taking walks, humour
 - build emotional intelligence by noticing and understanding their feelings and finding constructive ways to deal with them. Learning to manage emotions is a skill that takes time and practice
 - understand that drinking or taking drugs doesn't solve problems and can affect their mental health
 - deal with problems as they arise. Let them know you are there for them without needing to solve every issue.



It is also important for parents to role model good mental health habits. Young people learn from what they see you doing.

Encourage your young person to balance screen time with physical activity, hobbies and socialising to ensure a healthy lifestyle.

Being connected

Feeling a sense of belonging and connection starts at home. Young people thrive on love, acceptance, respect and encouragement. Involving them in family decisions is empowering. They're more likely to accept rules and limits when they've had a say.

At this stage of development young people are trying to figure out who they are, what they want and where they belong. Talking with people, sharing their thoughts and trying new activities help. Encourage your young person to:

- take part in family/kinship activities
- connect with friends. They learn social and emotional skills, eg being sensitive to other people's feelings and wellbeing
- have different groups they can talk to, eg family, friends, sporting teams or hobby groups. Adult mentors or Elders can help guide young people, bring new experiences into their life and help them pursue their interests and passions
- connect to culture, eg dance, music, art, traditions and rituals
- spend time in nature. This can reduce stress, improve attention, boost immunity and lift mood
- balance the time they spend online, especially on social media, with offline activities, eg socialising in person, team sports, interest groups.

Talking with young people

Having a trusted adult to talk to is a great way for young people to deal with their feelings and work things out. If they don't want to talk right away let them know you will wait until they're ready. Listening matters more than having all the answers.

It can make it easier for them to talk if you:

- spend regular one-on-one time together doing something you both enjoy
- tell them you care and will always be there for them
- name what you are feeling, eg worried, scared, sad, upset rather than saying or implying they have a problem
- let them know you've noticed how they are feeling, eg 'You seem really upset lately'
- use open-ended questions such as 'I wonder if there is something troubling you?' or 'How are things for you at the moment?' Listen and try to understand rather than give advice
- discuss solutions together to help build their problem-solving skills and confidence
- acknowledge their emotions and show empathy, eg 'I can see how that would upset you', or 'That must have been hard'
- avoid making dismissive comments, eg 'don't worry, it'll be fine' or 'just give it time'
- encourage them to talk to other trusted adults too.

Tell your young person you are there for them no matter what. Don't give up, even if it seems they don't want to talk.

Difficult feelings

It is normal for young people to have emotional ups and downs. They may feel cheerful and excited on some days and overwhelmed, sad or irritable on others. They often want more privacy or time on their own. In the pre-teen and teenage years this can happen more often and be more extreme. Sometimes you won't know why your young person feels up or down, and sometimes neither will they!



Having good information about the impact of puberty can help them make sense of their experience. Working with them to develop coping strategies will help them manage the emotional rollercoaster.

Help your young person deal with emotional ups and downs. Don't leave them to handle it alone.

Anxiety

Feeling worried or afraid is common in pre-teens and teenagers. It's our body's way of getting ready for tough situations. It can show up as stomach butterflies, tension, shakiness, nausea or sweating.

Everyone has anxiety at times. Talking to your young person about what makes them anxious can reduce it and help you understand them better. Discourage avoiding things that cause the anxiety as this will make it worse. Finding safe strategies that help them face the situation works much better. You can encourage:

- positive self-talk, eg 'I can handle this. I've faced tough situations before'
- self-compassion, eg 'It's okay if I do things differently, my way works for me'
- help-seeking, eg 'I need help with this project'

Consider seeing your GP if your young person:

- always feels nervous, anxious or worried
- has anxiety that lasts for weeks or even longer
- finds anxiety gets in the way of school, socialising or everyday activities.

Acknowledge your child's courage in facing their anxiety, no matter how small the step.

Depression

Depression is more than just feeling sad. It's when someone has a very low mood or feels empty or irritable for more than two weeks. It affects their daily life and the things they used to enjoy.

Depression can happen for various reasons, eg constant stress, unhealthy relationships, bullying or feeling isolated. Sometimes it's linked to family history or how someone copes with challenges. There isn't always a clear reason which can be frustrating.

Common signs of depression include:

- feeling sad, empty, irritable, overwhelmed or unmotivated
- having negative thoughts, difficulty concentrating or thoughts of self-harm or suicide
- feeling tired all the time, struggling with sleep or changes in appetite
- pulling away from friends and family, losing interest in things they liked or turning to alcohol or drugs.

If your young person shows these signs don't hesitate to talk with them and together seek professional help - your GP can guide you.

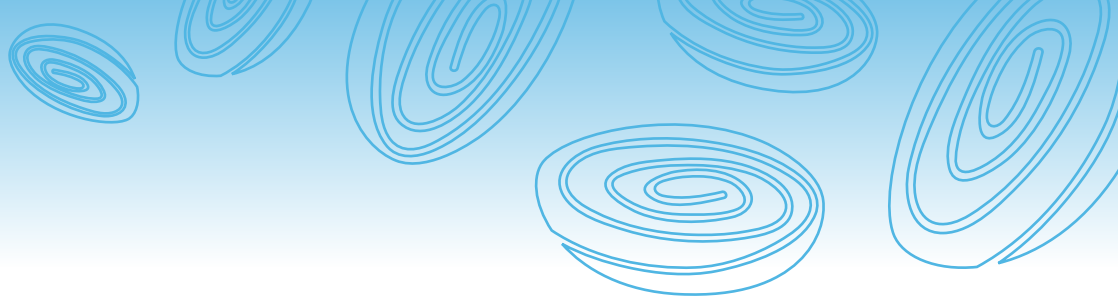
Early treatment for mental health problems can lead to good recovery for most pre-teens and teenagers. Don't delay.

Self-harm and suicide

Sometimes young people feel life is too much or have emotions that overwhelm them. Each individual deals with these feelings in their own way. This can include thinking about or actually harming themselves. For some these thoughts and behaviours can be a sign of a mental health problem that might continue into adulthood. For others it is a short-term response to distress or trauma.

Young people who self-harm often hide it because they're embarrassed or scared of how others will react. Self-harm can accidentally cause serious injury or death. If your young person is self-harming talk with them, let them know you care and want to help.





Some young people might think about suicide but usually they don't want to die. They just want their pain to go away. These thoughts can come unexpectedly or during tough times.

If you are worried your young person might be thinking about suicide it's best to ask them directly. Some people worry talking about it will make things worse but it can help them feel less alone and open up about their feelings.

It can be tough to hear but it's important to listen and let your young person talk. Tell them you understand it is hard for them and your support is always there.

Signs someone may be thinking about suicide include:

- talking about suicide, eg 'I wish I was dead', 'I wish I hadn't been born', 'I feel like giving up' or 'People would be better off if I wasn't here'
- talking about feeling hopeless or worthless either in person or online, eg social media
- talking a lot about death or dying; drawing, writing poetry, songs or stories about death or dying
- having a plan about how they will do it and the means to carry it out - seek help immediately to keep them safe
- giving away their possessions or saying goodbye to loved ones.

If your young person is severely self-harming or suicidal they need urgent professional help. If you cannot see a mental health professional immediately take them to a hospital emergency department.

Getting help

It might be time to get help if:

- talking with your young person hasn't helped and you are still worried
- their studies, work, friendships or social activities are affected
- the difficult feelings persist.

Help your young person understand that at times everyone has problems they can't work out alone. Encourage them to seek help early. You can arrange a mental health assessment with a GP, counsellor or mental health professional. They could also talk on the phone or chat online, eg Kids Helpline, Headspace, Beyond Blue.

If they don't want to talk to you, say nothing is wrong or won't talk with anyone else you may have to accept it is not the right time for them to get help. Be patient until they are ready and let them know you are always there to support them.

If your young person is at risk of harm to themselves or others seek professional help even if they don't want you to.

Looking after yourself

Mental health issues can take time to resolve and supporting a family member can be exhausting. You don't have to go through it alone. It is important to look after yourself too - this will make it easier to support your family.

- Acknowledge how you are supporting your young person. Be compassionate to yourself if you feel overwhelmed at times.
- Make time for something you enjoy each week, by yourself or with friends or family.
- Seek professional help if you're feeling overwhelmed or just need to talk about how your young person's situation is affecting you. Your GP, a counsellor or services like Lifeline can be good starting points.

Note: The term 'Parents' in this Guide refers to anyone caring for and/or raising children and young people, eg parents, caregivers, step-parents, grandparents, guardians, foster or kinship carers.



Want more information?

Emergency

Phone 000 for emergency assistance

Urgent Mental Health Care Centre (UMHCC)

Phone (08) 8448 9100, 24 hours

215 Grenfell Street, Adelaide

A welcoming place for people having a mental health crisis.

You can walk in or be referred <https://www.umhcc.org.au/>

SA Health Mental Triage Service

Phone 13 14 65, 24 hours

For assistance in a mental health emergency, information and referrals

See mental health services directory www.mhcsa.org.au/contact/need-help-now

Suicide Call Back Service

Phone 1300 659 467 or chat online, 24 hours

Counselling for anyone aged 15 and over affected by suicidal thoughts

(any younger callers will be referred to an appropriate service)

www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au

Lifeline

Phone 13 11 14 or chat online, 24 hours

Crisis support, suicide prevention and mental health services

www.lifeline.org.au

13 YARN

Phone 13 92 76, 24 hours

Crisis support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

www.13yarn.org.au

Services for young people

Kids Helpline

Phone 1800 551 800 or chat online, 24 hours

Support for children and young people aged 5-25 and their parents

www.kidshelp.com.au

Headspace

Phone 1800 650 890 or chat online at www.eHeadSpace.org.au,
9am-12.30am

To talk face to face find your local centre at

<https://headspace.org.au/headspace-centres/>

Information and free, confidential support for anyone aged 12-25

Youth Beyond Blue

Phone 1300 224 636 or chat online, 24 hours

Information and support for young people feeling depressed or anxious

www.youthbeyondblue.com

ReachOut

Free, anonymous and 24/7

Support for young people up to 25 years. Online community,

tools and apps for young people, and information for parents

www.reachout.com

If the above services have not been successful in resolving the young person's difficulties or if the difficulties significantly impact functioning, please contact:

CAMHS Connect

Phone 1300 222 647, Mon to Fri, 9am-5pm

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service provides services for children and young people with severe or complex mental health needs

www.wch.sa.gov.au/services/az/divisions/mentalhealth/index.html

Free apps to support young people's mental health

Black Dog Institute

Bite Back - to help improve mental fitness, increase happiness, reduce stress, improve friendships and focus

Sleep Ninja - for young people with sleep problems

www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/resources-support/digital-tools-apps

ReachOut Australia

Breakup Shakeup - to help after a break up

Calm Harm - to help resist or manage the urge to self-harm

Smiling Mind - mindfulness meditation

Headspace - meditation to help manage panic attacks, anxiety, stress

Check-in - to help check in with a friend without saying the wrong thing

www.reachout.com/tools-and-apps

Relationships Australia

Online safety planning app for young people having thoughts of suicide or self harm <https://mysafetyplanner.rasa.org.au/>

Support for parents

Raising Children Network

Parenting information on a range of topics including anxiety, depression, building resilience and mental health

www.raisingchildren.net.au

Raising Healthy Minds app

A free, personalised pocket resource for raising confident, resilient children <https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/raising-healthy-minds-child-mental-health>

Families Growing Together

'Living with Young People' and 'Coping Skills' workshops

<https://dhs.sa.gov.au/how-we-help/child-and-family-support-system-cfss/family-support-services/families-growing-together/families-growing-together-workshops>

Parenting SA

For more Parent Easy Guides including 'Living with young people', 'Young people, alcohol and drugs', 'Young people who are gay, lesbian or bisexual', 'Young people and parties', 'Young people, body image and food', 'Coping Skills' and 'Bullying'

For videos – 'Living with Young People', 'Living with Teenagers', 'Teenagers and feelings' and 'Sleep and teenagers'

www.parenting.sa.gov.au





**Government
of South Australia**

Parenting SA

A partnership between the
Department of Human Services and
the Women's and Children's Health Network.

Web: www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Parent Easy Guides are free in South Australia.

Important: This information is not intended
to replace advice from a qualified practitioner.

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