

Teen Wellbeing

A guide for parents and carers



Written & produced by

Every life matters ...

Contents

Introduction	5
Listening Tips	7
The Foundations of Wellbeing	8
What is Mental Health?	12
Depression	14
Anxiety	18
Thoughts of Suicide	22
Self-harm	30
Exam Pressure	36
Bullying	42
School Refusal	50
Raising Digital Teens	56
Drugs, Alcohol and Vaping	64
Sex and Pornography	68
Disordered Eating	72
Sexuality & Gender Identity	78
Neurodivergence	82
Life Events	88
Help Them to Help Themselves	96
Help and Support	98
Apps	102





Introduction

This booklet is a guide to help you support your young person with their wellbeing.

We want to encourage you as a parent, we know that you care, you are invested in your child, and you want the best for them.

It will equip you with knowledge, guidance and point to where you can get more support if your young person needs a little extra help. It's not an exhaustive guide, but it might just start a conversation that can get them back on track.



Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.

Stephen R Covey

Listening Tips

As you navigate the topics that your child might be facing, the most important thing you can do is to listen to your child.

Our top tips for how to listen well.

You do not need to fix it.

Listening to your child's problems is not easy and it is often tempting to try to offer solutions. The most important thing is to allow them space to talk and this means being willing to bear their distress and listen patiently and attentively. Sometimes, they may just need to vent their feelings, and they just need you to listen, not fix.

Ask open questions. This is vital in keeping the conversation going, and hearing what they're thinking. Open questions invite someone to say more than 'yes' or 'no'. Try these instead, 'How have you been feeling?' or 'What happened next?'

Offer prompts. You can encourage your child to talk more through phrases such as 'Can you tell me more about that?' or even simply reflecting back, 'it sounds like you are having a tough time with that friend.'

Be patient. It helps if you let them take their time. If they feel unable to speak fully at that time or if your attention is divided, acknowledge the importance of what they've said and arrange another time to talk. Be willing to bear silences.

Take their feelings seriously. Take whatever they say seriously. Don't offer platitudes like 'things will pick up', 'Life's too short', and don't minimise their feelings, remember that what they are feeling matters very much to them.

Avoid judgements. You might feel shocked, upset or frightened, but it's important not to blame your child for how they are feeling. They may have taken a big step by telling you and if they feel judged this may silence them.

You don't need to have all the answers. It's OK to not know what to say! You're human. If you don't know what to say – be honest and tell them.

The Foundations of Wellbeing

The following ideas will help your child develop strong foundations in their wellbeing. If we get teenagers rooted in these from the start, they will stand a better chance when weathering life's storms as an adult.

Sleep

Late nights, not enough sleep, disturbed sleep (from bad dreams, or woken by family/pets/noise) can lead to poor health and poor brain function, a drop in school performance, and an increase in risk-taking behaviour.

Teenagers need 8-10 hours of sleep, but research shows that teens don't produce melatonin (a hormone that helps you fall asleep) until later at night, so asking them to go to bed at 10pm, is like asking you to fall asleep at 8pm. This can leave them feeling tired in the mornings.

☆ Try these tips:

Sleep routine – ask your child to go to bed at the same time every night, even at weekends.

Bedrooms are for sleeping – keep devices out of the room, as the blue light can cause sleep delays. Put devices away at least an hour before bed.

Reduce caffeine – avoid caffeine later in the afternoon.

Exercise – daily activity helps us feel physically tired by bedtime, but avoid it right before bed, as the 'buzz' from exercising takes a while to wear off.

Exercise

Physical exercise can help manage stress, anxiety, help lift mood and can make you tired, aiding sleep. Exercise can be anything from yoga, Just Dance videos, cycling, running, playing basketball or football, or walking to and from school.

To stay healthy, teenagers should aim for 60 minutes of vigorous activity a day. Joining a club can also help them to widen their social circle, and find positive affirmation outside of school too.



Eat well

Top Tips for feeding teenagers:

- Don't skip breakfast
- Eat 3 meals, plus healthy snacks
- Eat iron-rich foods (found in red meat, nuts, green leafy veg, dried fruit)
- Boost calcium intake (found in dairy)
- Avoid alcohol
- Avoid fast food
- Drink plenty of fluids



Routine

Having a routine creates a sense of security and predictability.

Routines can include:

Bedtimes – including downtime, preparing for bed and a regular sleep time.

Mealtimes – eat together whenever possible, eat downstairs, and turn off the telly.

Time to exercise – this doesn't have to be a class or sports club, but could be walking the dog or playing in the park.

Downtime – downtime can help to refresh and recharge. It might include watching telly for a limited time, having a snack, playing with the dog, or friends. If they struggle to move on after downtime, agree a time limit.

Connection: Family, Friends, Community

Family

Connection with family is central for teenagers, even as they start to spend more time with their friends. Make the time and effort to know where your child is, what they are up to and who they are spending time with.

Friends

Spending time with friends is increasingly important as teenagers grow. It helps them learn about the world around them, practice friendship and relationships, ask questions they can't ask their parents, and experiment in a group of people their age. Support their efforts in making friends: help them to join clubs or groups or give them lifts to meet mates at the weekend.

Community

Contributing to a community has a positive effect on teen wellbeing. Some schools offer pupils the chance of being a 'peer mentor' (mentoring or supporting pupils in the years below them), or other areas of responsibility. Your child might prefer to help with a football club outside school, or join Scouts, where acts of service are an important value.



What is Mental Health?

Physical health addresses how our body is: we can be in good health, or poor health. In the same way, we all have mental health, which affects how we think, feel and behave. We can have poor mental health, and good mental health. Just as we might have a physical health condition, but live well with it, we can have a mental health condition and live well with it too.

Conversation Starters



You haven't seemed yourself recently, would you tell me what's changed?



I noticed you seem to have lost interest in [playing with the dog / seeing friends / playing sport]. I'm concerned about you. Can you tell me what's changed?



I can help you get through this, we can do it together.



It's okay if you don't want to talk to me, but it is important that you talk to someone. Who would you feel comfortable talking to?



Your mood seems really low at the moment / you seem anxious about lots of things. Have you noticed that too? What do you think is going on?

Depression

Depression is a condition that affects mood, often causing individuals to feel low and making everyday tasks difficult. It can lead to feelings of hopelessness, and in some cases, thoughts of suicide. If you notice your child has been feeling low for a few weeks, it's important to listen to them to understand how they are thinking and feeling. Only a doctor can diagnose depression, but if your child exhibits any of these symptoms, make an appointment with their GP.

Spot the Signs of Depression

- Not enjoying things that they used to
- Tired or low energy, even when they have rested
- Sleep problems
- Feeling worthless, hopeless or guilty all the time
- Changes in eating habits
- Feeling sad, hopeless or anxious most of the time
- Aches or pains that have no obvious cause
- Self-harming or having thoughts of suicide
- Not wanting to see people, or go out



What you can do to help

If your child has depression, you can help them by:

Listening to them. Give them your time and attention to talk about how they are feeling. You don't need to come up with solutions; sometimes, simply providing space and offering your full attention can help.

Encourage them to talk to someone. If they have seen their GP, they may have been referred for counselling. Talking can really help. If they haven't seen their GP yet, encourage them to book an appointment, and offer to go with them if they would like you to. The GP will ask them some questions about how they are feeling and may refer them for counselling/therapy.

This document is really useful when preparing to see the GP:

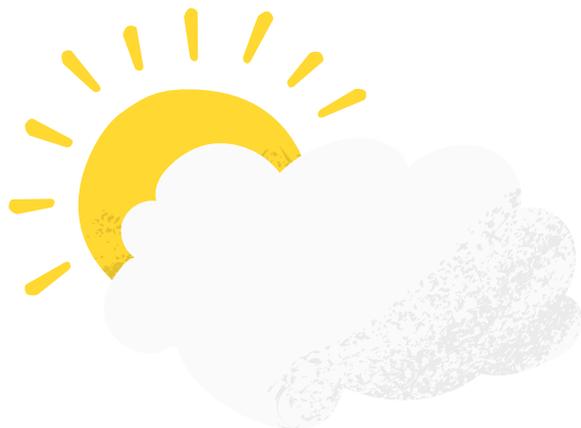
If they don't have a counsellor, or you are waiting for a referral, they can speak to a counsellor via Childline or can talk to someone when they need to by texting **SHOUT** to **85258**.



Celebrate the small wins. If your child is depressed, even getting up and getting dressed can feel overwhelming. Find small reasons to remind your child that you are proud of them, and always remind them that you love them.

Remind them that things will get better. With support and help, depression can get better, and they won't feel this way forever.

Spend time with them. Going out and meeting friends can be challenging when you're depressed, so their social circle may have shrunk. Spend time with them doing low-pressure activities like playing a game, making snacks, or watching a film together.



“

"When she doesn't have energy for anything, we watch an episode of something together. It's not a fix, but it's time we spend side-by-side, and time out of her room."

Sally

“

"Sometimes, just getting him to go for a walk with me is a win. A little movement, a little sunshine – it helps, even if just a bit."

Jonny

Want to know more?

Childline have created this resource for young people on the topic of depression.



Young Minds have created this resource for parents, on the topic of depression.



The NHS also have a guide for parents who are worried about their child's low mood.



Family Lives also have a guide for parents who are worried about their child's low mood.



Anxiety

Anxiety is when we feel worried, panicky or scared of something. It's a normal response, and lots of people feel anxious from time to time, in fact, it can be a helpful feeling – it's what stops us from doing something dangerous, or can prompt us to prepare better for an exam. But anxiety is a problem when your child feels anxious **most of the time and it stops them from doing things.**

Spot the Signs of Anxiety

It can make you:

- feel your heart beating really fast
- feel scared, worried or tense
- feel fidgety or shaky
- feel sick or get a funny feeling in your stomach
- struggle to think about other things
- have a panic attack.

If your child is feeling anxious most of the time, and it prevents them from doing normal everyday things, then book them an appointment with their GP.

What you can do to help

To help them when they are feeling very anxious or overwhelmed, try one of these ideas:

Slow the breathing down. There are several breathing activities to try, you can read more here.



Exercise or distraction. Moving around can help them to use up some of their nervous energy. Distraction can be useful to help your child stay in the moment when they feel the anxiety building, and allow the physical sensations to calm down. However, if they have a panic attack, guide them to calm their breathing by breathing in for four seconds, hold for four, out for four.

Grounding techniques. This helps them to be present in the moment, and not let their thoughts spin out of control. A simple one is 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

Grounding technique

5

things you can see right now

4

things you can hear right now

3

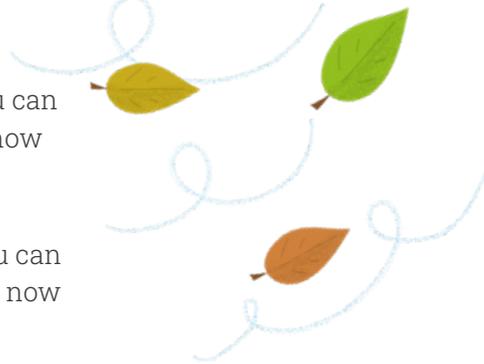
things you can touch, and reach out and touch them, right now

2

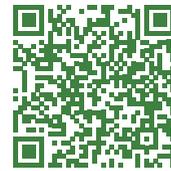
things you can smell or like the smell of

1

slow, deep breath. Then focus on your breathing



Want to know more?



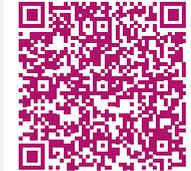
Young Minds

also have a guide for parents about anxiety.



Childline

have a guide for young people, on how to cope with panic attacks.



Mind

also have a guide for self-care and panic attacks.

“

“I realised it helps when I stay calm, too. The more relaxed I am, the less his anxiety flares up, and the more quickly it goes.”

David

“

“We avoid saying ‘calm down’ and instead use ‘I’m here with you.’ It makes him feel supported, and less alone.”

Debs

Thoughts of Suicide

1 in 4 people will have thoughts of suicide in their lifetime, and 1 in 15 people will have thoughts of suicide each year. Thoughts of suicide are very common, and whilst it might feel very frightening to learn that your child is having these thoughts, very few young people will act on these thoughts. However, it's always important to take these feelings seriously.

If you are worried that your child might be having thoughts of suicide, it's best to ask, and ask directly - you won't put the idea into their minds. If they are having thoughts of suicide, they may be desperate for someone else to ask, as having those thoughts is very isolating, lonely and frightening. Asking directly is a compassionate thing to do.

As a parent, it can be very hard to care for someone with depression or thoughts of suicide. Reach out for help for you too. There's plenty of organisations to support you, at the back of this booklet.

Conversation Starters

“

It's okay if you don't want to talk to me, but it is important that you talk to someone.

“

I've noticed that you haven't seemed yourself lately. You seem [anxious, down] and I wondered if you have been having thoughts of suicide?

“

I can help you get through this, we can do it together.

“

Sometimes when someone faces problems like yours, it can seem really hard to see a way to cope, and sometimes they might have thoughts of ending their life. Have you been having any thoughts like that?

Spot the signs of thoughts of suicide

What they might say:

- Constant negativity
- Talking about wanting to die or kill themselves even if these statements are veiled or even jokey
- Talking about feeling trapped or hopeless
- 'They'll be sorry.'
- 'They'd be better off without me.'
- 'I wish I wasn't here.'
- 'I hate my life.'
- 'What's the point?'
- 'I'm fine...'
- Saying goodbye

What might be happening in their lives:

- A major loss or change: bereavement, parental divorce, moving home or school, relationship breakdown
- Exam time

What you might see in their behaviour:

- Increased alcohol or drug use
- Increased recklessness, as if they have a death wish
- Increased self-harming
- Withdrawing or isolating themselves
- Concerning or cryptic social media posts or removing themselves completely from social media
- Giving things away and saying goodbye in a strange or cryptic manner
- Researching ways to kill oneself online or other suicide related searches
- Losing interest in things they used to enjoy
- Self-neglect
- Distracted at school, carelessness, absenteeism
- Changes in appetite, sleeping patterns
- Sudden improvements in mood after a prolonged period of depression might suggest they've made a decision to end their life



What you can do to help

First of all, make sure you have asked the question directly. If they are having thoughts of suicide, don't panic, but try to listen to what they say next.

Listen. We know that talking really helps; but for someone to be able to talk about their thoughts of suicide – they need someone to be willing to listen and most importantly they need someone to be willing to listen about their reasons for wanting to die, and the depth of their pain and distress. The most important thing you can do is to listen, and to listen compassionately

Ask about plans. Ask them if they have made any plans or preparations to end their life. Have they planned how, when, or where they would do it? Have they collected items they might need, such as medication? If so, it is more urgent you get help. Ask for an emergency GP appointment, or call NHS 111 and describe exactly what your child is telling you about their plans and preparations. If your child has a plan of how they would do it, then make sure you remove these items from the house or store them safely and securely.



Safety planning. A safety plan is a plan that you can help your child to create, giving step-by-step guidance to live safely with thoughts of suicide. It helps to guide them when the thoughts arise, and will help to keep them safe. Every Life Matters has one here you can use.

Get help. Don't carry the load alone. It's a good idea to contact the GP, as they are gatekeepers for NHS referrals. Two important bits of advice: be prepared, and be honest.



Doc Ready is a website that helps you plan what you are going to say to the GP, by listing symptoms for you to select from, creating a concise document to guide your conversation with the GP.

Every Life Matters has lots of information on how you can support someone experiencing thoughts of suicide, and how to help them to make a safety plan.



When to get urgent help

If your child has already hurt themselves, swallowed medication or other harmful substances, call 999 and follow instructions.



If your child is very distressed and is struggling to keep themselves safe – for example they have an overwhelming urge to seriously harm themselves that they can't control – then take them to A&E or call NHS 111.

It's OK to call the emergency services or go to A&E: a mental health crisis is just as serious as a physical health issue.

Where to get more help

Helplines

As part of keeping your child safe put at least the first 2 of these numbers in your child's phone. Encourage your child to call/text these numbers if they are alone and having thoughts of suicide, or have no one else to talk to at that point.

Papyrus Hopeline

Young People's support 24/7 0800 068 4141

Shout 24/7 Text Crisis line

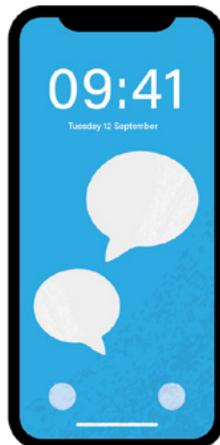
Text Shout to 85258

Childline – helpline 24/7

0800 11 11 or email via Childline's Locker

Samaritans 24/7 support

116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org



Want to know more?

Childline have information for young people about thoughts of suicide.



Young Minds also have a guide for parents on thoughts of suicide.



Care for the Family have a video to help you start a conversation with your child about depression or thoughts of suicide.



Our website has even more places to get help including plenty of resources and a safety planning guide



Self-harm

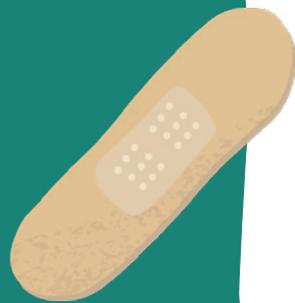
Self-harm is when someone hurts themselves on purpose. Examples of self-harm include cutting, burning, poisoning and bruising. Other forms of more indirect self-harm may be self-neglect or excessive risk-taking behaviour.

Self-harming behaviour is relatively common - at least 10% of teenagers report having self-harmed - and it can affect anyone of any age, background or race. But it's a problem that needs to be taken seriously. Self-harm is not a positive way to deal with difficult feelings and experiences, and over time it can be hard to stop. That's why it's so important to spot it as soon as possible and do everything you can to help.

Spot the signs of Self-harm

Worried someone you care for might be self-harming? Keep an eye open for these signs:

- Unexplained cuts, burns, bite-marks, bruises or bald patches
- Bloody tissues, bandages or wipes in waste bins
- Concealed lighters or sharps
- Becoming withdrawn or isolated
- Low mood, lack of interest in life or depression
- Blaming themselves for problems
- Feeling like a failure, useless, or hopeless
- Keeping their body covered



“If your child tells you they are self-harming, take a deep breath and stay calm. Thank them for coming to tell you. Tell them they’ve done an amazingly brave thing to trust you. Tell them it’s going to be something you can, and always will be able to help them with.”

Louise

What you can do to help

Friends and family can play a huge role in supporting someone who self-harms.

You can help by:

- **Offer a listening ear** and show you care when your child is struggling.
- **Avoid judgements**; we know that terms like ‘attention seeking’ stop people from seeking help.
- **Remind the person of their strengths** and abilities.
- **Look online or at recommended apps together** for coping strategies and ways they can manage self-harm urges. Remember, what works for some may not work for others. Encourage them to try different strategies until they find one that works.
- **Encourage them to keep a diary**, to look for patterns, triggers and urges.
- **Explore what support and services are available** and offer to go with them to appointments.
- **Agree with them** about access to self-harm methods.
- **Make sure first aid materials are available** and encourage them to get medical attention when needed.
- **Watch for signs of bullying**, abuse or other difficult situations that may be triggering self-harm.
- **Don’t treat them any differently from normal** in other areas of their life.
- **Appreciate that they might not be able to stop immediately**, it will take time and their recovery may be bumpy.
- **Be mindful of unhelpful social media use.**



Conversation Starters

If you are worried that your child may be self-harming - start the conversation, and be prepared to listen. Be honest and open with them and explain why you are concerned – re-assure them that you are there to listen, that you love them, and that will not change. If they are unwilling to talk to you now, give them space and re-assure them that there are people who are there to talk to and who will listen.

“

I noticed [sharp objects, matches, bloodied tissues] and it made me wonder if you have been hurting yourself to cope with the things you are going through. Do you want to tell me about it?

“

I have noticed [the marks under your sleeves / blood stains on your clothes or bedding] and I wondered if you wanted me to look at the wounds to help you care for them?

“

You seem quite down at the moment, and I wondered if you want to talk about?

“

It's okay if you don't want to talk to me, but it is important that you talk to someone.

“

You have seemed very low at the moment, and I've noticed you have taken less care of yourself recently. Can you tell me what's been happening?

When to get more help

If your child is self-harming, you should seek further help, if the self-harm or distress is increasing in frequency or intensity or you notice additional problems such as anxiety, low mood or thoughts of suicide.

Check out the Support Directory on our website for information about where your child can get further support.

Help with wounds

If your child is self-harming regularly, particularly cutting or other physical harm, make sure they have advice about wound care, and if necessary, consult your GP about how they can care for their wounds. You can also discuss self-referral for talking therapies or CBT.

If your child has a wound that is deep, or continues to bleed through the dressing or if the wound becomes infected, then go straight to the Urgent Treatment Care or A&E.

Want to know more?



Every Life Matters: We have information and kits available to help parents and carers and young people who are self-harming.



Alumina: www.selfharm.co.uk Information, and a weekly online self-help course for young people 11-19, running over 6 weeks.



DistrACT: A thorough app covering distraction techniques, self-help, and where to get help.



Calm Harm: A free app to help manage the urge to self-harm.



First Aid: Download the Red Cross First Aid app for help caring for wounds.

Exam Pressure

Being under pressure to do well at school is the biggest worry 16-year-olds face.

Exam pressure can turn into stress when the pressure becomes unbearable. Stress can lead to anxiety and depression, which have adverse effects on a child, and can have long-term consequences.

So, what contributes to a child's stress?

- Be all and end all: GCSEs and A Level exams have a lot riding on them. The results determine a place at college or university, and job prospects.
- Competition for places: Competition for securing degree apprenticeships, apprenticeships, and university places is at an all-time high, which adds pressure when competing against peers.
- Expectations: Students feel the weight of expectations from parents, relatives and teachers who all believe the pupil is capable and want them to reach their full potential.
- Being a young carer, or having difficulties with relationships at home.
- Having autism, ADHD or a different disability.

As parents and carers, you can help your child to find a good balance to help prevent them from being overwhelmed by exam pressure and keep afloat.

“

How does exam pressure feel?

'It feels like there is too much to do in too little time left. I keep imagining getting my results and failing. I feel like I can't remember anything I have learned.'

“

How does exam pressure feel?

'Like I have a crushing weight on me. I find it so hard to do anything with the pressure.'



When to get more help

If your child doesn't seem to be coping, you might spot these signs:

- Working long hours (early and late), and being unable to stop working
- Not making time to eat
- Not getting up at all, staying in bed all-day
- Not focused, and finding it hard to stay settled
- Procrastinating
- Mood swings or being withdrawn
- Being overly self-critical
- Complaining of health issues, like stomach ache or headaches.



Where to get more help

- **Speak to their head of year.** They may be able to provide subject-specific resources, tips on how to revise, or even give them somewhere to revise in school.
- **Speak to their GP,** especially if they seem to have low mood, feel very anxious, or are worried about their health
- **They can call Childline** or chat to a counsellor at The Mix

Conversation Starters



Where do you think the pressure is coming from? (Yourself? Teachers? Peers? Home?)



Is there something you think we could do to help you?



If you had an hour of free time, what would you choose to do? Do you think that helps your body and mind to relax?



Do you think you are comparing yourself to others?

Want to know more?



Papyrus have a resource for young people coping with exams.



Young Minds also have a resource for young people coping with exams.



Mind have information for young people on what exam stress is, and how to cope.



Bullying

Bullying is the persistent behaviour which is intended to hurt someone. It can be summarised as Several Times, On Purpose – or STOP.

It can happen anywhere, at home, school, work or online.

It doesn't always leave a mark, it can be humiliation, exclusion, undermining someone, verbally or racially abusing them, spreading rumours or making threats.

Conversation Starters

“

You haven't seemed yourself recently, would you tell me what's changed?

“

I noticed you seemed frightened / tense / tearful when you got home today. Can you tell me what's going on?

“

I haven't seen you hang out with [friend] recently, has something happened?

“

I can help you get through this, we can do it together.

1 in 10 secondary school-aged children admitted to having been bullied in the last year online.

What to do if your child is being bullied

- **Start a conversation.** Ask open questions to get them talking to you. Patiently listen to what they say. It will take courage for them to start talking about it.
- **They may not want to talk about it.** Reassure them that it's ok not to talk but that you are always ready to listen if they change their mind. You could give them the option of talking to a trusted friend or adult.
- **Try not to overreact** when they start to tell you their story. Listen, breathe, and don't jump in until they are finished. Focus on supporting them, not fixing it.
- **Don't minimise their experience,** or dismiss it. Don't underestimate how very cruel teenagers can be.
- **Reassure them** that you are glad they told you and that you will help them get through this.
- **Keep a log of the incidents,** photos of any injuries, or screenshots of online content. Ask your child to tell you as soon as it happens, as it can be difficult to keep track of.
- **Help them to re-build their self-esteem** by doing activities they enjoy, and encourage their efforts.
- **Encourage them to see friends** who build them up or to try clubs or groups to broaden their friendship groups.

1 in 6 secondary school-aged children admitted to having been bullied in the last year.



How to stop the bullying

If the bullying is happening at school

Check school's policy. (it's usually online, if not, ask for it.) Schools have the legal power to intervene even if it's happening outside school hours.

Meet their form tutor. Show them your log of evidence, and agree on a plan of action to support your child. After the meeting, email them to confirm what you agreed.

If your child is worried about speaking to the teacher, remind them that no teacher wants to have bullying in their school, and that everyone wants to stamp it out.

If your child refuses to go to school, listen, and reassure them that you understand. Pushing them to go, getting angry or arguing about it may make their anxiety worse. Give them space and inform school of the reason.



If the bullying is happening outside school

Talk to your child about what they want you to do. You can report it to the police, but if you decide not to, make a plan for what your child can do if they meet the bullies. This might be to call you, call a friend or the police.

Make arrangements so that your child always goes out with friends that they trust.

If the bullying is happening at a club or activity, meet the group leader to talk about it.

If the bullying is happening online

The platform or game will have an anti-bullying policy. Report the bullying, taking screenshots for your log of evidence. Then, block the bully.

If the bullies are pupils at your child's school, or even another local school, report the behaviour to the school, showing them evidence from the screenshots too. You could also report it to the local police, by calling 101.

If it doesn't stop, keep reporting it. This means checking in with you child and asking them how it's going.

If the bullying involves a video or photo, report it to the platform. They have a responsibility to remove certain media immediately.

Don't just ban them from using the app or platform, teach them how to keep themselves safe online. (See section on 'Digital Teens')



When to get more help

If your child has been bullied, chances are it has affected their confidence and self-esteem. If it happened in school, or by peers outside school, the school counselling service may be able to offer support.

If your child is:

- finding it difficult to go out of the house
- is aggressive, angry
- has low mood
- Is self-harming or displaying risk-taking behaviour

Then speak to the GP in the first instance, or get support through one of the national charities below.

Where to get more help

Speak to your child's GP. Be as honest as you can, and prepare what you and your child want to say in advance.



Kidscape is a charity offering support and advice to parents/carers and young people who are being bullied.



Family Lives Parents' Line 0808 800 2222 (see website for opening times)

The NSPCC Helpline is available on 0808 800 5000 or via help@nspcc.org.uk. Their child protection specialists can offer support and discuss any worries you have.

Your child can contact **Childline** by phone 0800 1111. They can create an account called a Locker, and through the locker and contact Childline by email, or through online 1-2-1 counselling.

Want to know more?



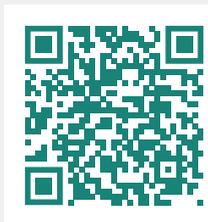
Childline have a page on bullying, advice on coping and making it stop.



Childline have advice on how to block or report bullying on Social Media platforms.



The Anti-bullying Alliance have information around supporting **neurodivergent** children, as they are more at risk of being bullied.



Family Lives have information about bullying for parents.



Resources for young people:

Childline have created a guide with help on different aspects of bullying, from how to talk to someone about it, to where to get help.



The Mix have a page for young people about different aspects of bullying, from sexual bullying, bullying at work, or if your child is the bully, there's lots of information for them.

School Refusal

School refusal is where a child is so anxious, they can't go to school. It's sometimes called Emotionally Based School Avoidance.

Your child might:

- Pretend to be unwell or become unwell to avoid school
- Get upset or distressed the night before, or morning of school
- Leave school early or misses lessons

As a parent, it can be very hard to stay patient and be understanding when your child is refusing to go to school. Reach out for help for you too. There's plenty of organisations to support you, at the back of this booklet.

Why is my child refusing to go to school?

There are lots of reasons, such as:

- A big fall out with friends
- Bullying, including on transport to school
- Problems with school, eg academic pressure, PE lessons, in trouble in class
- Things at home, such as conflict, medical worries or worried about leaving you
- Neurodivergence can lead to 'burnout', and make school feel impossible
- Other emotional or mental health issues, such as depression or anxiety

What you can do to help

- **Ask them to talk to you about how they are feeling.**
- **Listen to what they say** – try not to interrupt or talk over them. Repeat back key phrases or ask open questions, such as ‘Exams? Tell me more about your worry about exams.’
- **Avoid arguing about it.** Listen to their reasons for staying home, and don’t get angry or frustrated with them, as this can make them feel more anxious, and shut down.
- **Teach them how to use breathing techniques** when they feel the anxiety building. (see ‘Anxiety’)
- **Rebuild their confidence** with positive praise whenever you see an opportunity.
- **Keep routines consistent**, even if your child isn’t going to school. Having a consistent morning routine, with a regular time to get up and breakfast. Limit gaming or screen time, as it might make staying at home too tempting.
- **Create a plan to help your child overcome their anxieties.**
This might include taking each stage a day at a time, for example: Getting dressed for school, but not going to school; getting ready for school and getting to the bus, but not going to school, then the following day, travelling to school then coming home. By breaking the steps down into manageable ones, your child gains confidence during the process.



Conversation Starters



You haven't seemed yourself recently, would you tell me what's changed?



I noticed you seem frightened / tense / tearful when you got up today. Can you tell me what's going on?



You seem to be feeling ill a lot at the moment. Sometimes being worried can make us feel ill. Do you think you might be worried?



I can help you get through this, we can do it together.

When to get more help

If your child has missed school more than a handful of times, it would be a good idea to **reach out to school**, before they contact you about attendance.

If your child is so anxious it's affecting their mental health, **speak to their GP** and see what support they can offer; this is particularly important if they are self-harming or having thoughts of suicide (see also 'Anxiety').

“

“Having open, no-pressure conversations helped my daughter talk about why school felt so hard. Sometimes just listening without pushing gave her the courage to go.”

Gemma

Where to get more help

Start with contacting their School and arrange to speak to their head of year. See what support they may be able to offer. Make a plan that you, your child and the school are happy with, and is manageable.

If your child has an EHCP in place, meet with the **SENCo** to discuss the provision and review it; it might be that it's not effective.

If your child is missing school because of **bullying**, check their school's policy on bullying, and see what they put in place for these situations.

Make an appointment with their **GP** if you have concerns for their mental health. If your child is under any other healthcare professional, such as speech and language, or CAMHS, get in touch with them too.



You could speak to the **SENDIAS** (SEND Information and Advice Service) team, who are a council department that support children with special educational needs or a disability. You can find your local team here.

“

“This was really difficult for us to handle, because we were so worried about him falling behind. But actually, listening to him and giving him time off school probably sped up his return. It also reduced the battle, and he felt we were on his team. It's been a good thing for our relationship with him too.”

Rebecca

Want to know more?



Not Fine In School

is a support group and collection of resources to help families who have a child with unmet SEN needs, and as a result are not able to attend school regularly.



Care for the Family

have a video to help families who have a child who is reluctant to go to school, and how to help guide a conversation and reach out to school.



Young Minds

have a resource to support parents when their child is anxious and refusing to go to school.

Raising Digital Teens

The digital age has boomed, and is here to stay. The temptation is to see it as a negative, and either bury our heads in the sand to the risks, or place heavy restrictions on usage. However, technology and social media can be a very positive resource, for learning, socialising, staying organised and for connecting with people like them. As your child grows towards adulthood, you want to equip and teach them how to stay safe and make healthy choices, after all, the modern workplace relies on digital skills.



Conversation Starters

“

Who do you follow on social media, and what interests you about their posts?

“

How do you feel when someone likes your post? And what about if it gets very few likes?

“

How do you feel after spending time on social media?

“

What are the funniest memes going through your friendship group?

Top Ten T'Internet Tips

- 1. Be a good role model.** Demonstrate good practices in terms of when you use your device, where using it is not appropriate, and setting good boundaries. Your children will learn from what you do, not from what you say.
- 2. Keep up to date.** Allow your children to educate you on the apps they use, platforms they prefer, or new trends. Or, watch YouTube explainers.
- 3. Screen time shouldn't be ALL the time.** Talk to them about what limits they think are reasonable. The likelihood is that the more screen time they have, the more they will resist having any tech-free time, so you may have to start with a small tech-free window and increase it over time.
- 4. E-safety.** Make sure they understand the consequences of sharing personal information online, and explain what digital information is private. If they googled you, what would they be able to learn about you? There's plenty of e-learning, so if you aren't sure yourself, google it, or see below.
- 5. Privacy settings.** Look at the settings on each app or platform and talk to them about what each level of privacy does.



“We set screen-free times during meals and before bed. Sticking to it as a family helped my son accept it as normal rather than a punishment.”
Daniel

- 6. Social connection.** Rather than just doomscrolling through reels, encourage them to chat online, video call or text family and friends. Connection is a real positive of social media, and it makes the world a much smaller place.
- 7. Nurture honesty.** Your child will make mistakes online or may see things that upset them, so create open conversations and try not to overreact when they talk to you about it.
- 8. Find your tribe.** This is a big plus for social media; if your child has a niche interest or finds making friends difficult, finding their tribe online connects them to people like them, in supportive communities. Remember to help them discern how much personal information to share.
- 9. Education.** These days, a young person is far more likely to learn about their mental health online than in a doctor's waiting room, so encourage them to use apps like DistrACT or CALM etc. However, if they are researching about ultra-dieting, self-harm or suicide, they need to reach out to get professional help.
- 10. Keep an open mind.** As parents, technology is something we have had to learn, and many are suspicious or negative about it. If you have a closed mind, it is likely to become a topic they avoid talking to you about. Allow them to educate you, to correct your views, and to share it with you. Technology is here to stay.

“I asked her to show me things she liked on social media instead of just telling her to get off her phone. Knowing what she was interested in was actually really reassuring.”
Shona

When to get more help

If your child is developing unhealthy habits, or researching topics relating to disordered eating or suicide, or viewing violent or sexual content online, it can be difficult to know how to start a conversation, or tackle it and you may need help.



Where to get more help

The **NSPCC Helpline** is available on 0808 800 5000 or via help@nspcc.org.uk. Their child protection specialists can offer support and discuss any worries you have.

Your child can contact **Childline** by phone 0800 1111. Or, via the website your child can create an account called a Locker, and through the locker, access support by email, or through online 1-2-1 counselling.

Want to know more?

The Dark Web Explained Think U Know have an explainer video about what the Dark Web is.

They strongly recommend that you don't show the video to your child, as it's for parents or professionals.



Stop It Now have advice for parents, if your child gets into trouble for their online sexual behaviour.



Ygam offer free training to anyone who works with or supports young people to help navigate gaming and gambling.



CEOP have information for someone whose nude photo has been shared.



If you are worried that your child is being groomed online, or sexually exploited, report it to **CEOP**. Here's how to report it.



Young Minds have a page all about addictions, including those found online. They have advice, and can signpost to specialist organisations.



More resources

You can find out more about how children use social media, the apps they use, the risks they face, how to use privacy settings, and advice and tips about how to talk to your children on the following sites:

Internet Matters



Parent Zone



Childnet



NSPCC



CEOP



Gaming



Ask About Games is a website that reviews games, and gives parents a description of theme, and other 'positive play' themes. It only rates games that are positive, rather than violent games to encourage positive, family gaming.

NSPCC have advice for parents on gaming, including how to stay safe, and what to look out for.

Common Sense Media is a very thorough parents' guide to various social media apps, games, films, TV shows, and much more. Each one is rated and has ratings for topics like 'violence and scariness', 'sex, romance & nudity', 'positive messages' etc. It does have a limited number of free views, and requires an account.

Care for the Family have some honest videos discussing difficult topics for parents, such as sex and pornography, drugs and alcohol, and violence and aggression.



Drugs, Alcohol and Vaping

Teenagers explore boundaries on the journey to adulthood, it's a natural part of growing up. Experimenting with alcohol is common in teenagers, and a few may experiment with illegal drugs or vaping at some point. The majority who try drugs don't go on to use them long-term, and most who drink alcohol don't go on to develop dependency issues. If you think your child may be using alcohol or drugs, try not to panic or overreact.



Conversation starters

“

I care about your wellbeing, and I want to make sure you have all the information you need to make healthy choices. Can we talk about [smoking/ vaping/ how much you are drinking]?

“

Did you know that smoking and vaping can have an effect on your athletic performance? It can affect your lungs and fitness. I know sports are important to you, so I want to talk about it.

“

Your behaviour seems off at the moment and given how much you've been out lately, I want to talk to you about if you've been using drugs?

What you can do to help

If you think your child might be vaping, drinking or using drugs, reacting rashly can shut the conversation down quickly, so try to stay calm, and listen.

Here are our top tips for helping your child:

Listen to what they say, and ask open questions about why they do it, and how they feel about it.

Allow plenty of time for the conversation, and don't rush it.

Park your opinion and don't sit in judgment.

Ask 'Why?' You might be surprised by their reason for it. Some reasons include:

- Peer pressure
- It's fun in the moment
- They are curious to know what it's like
- It's a distraction from problems
- They feel like a more confident or outgoing version of themselves



Ask what they know about the risks. If you don't know a lot about alcohol, vaping or the different drugs available, including the risks, FRANK has an A-Z guide here: You could look at the website and explore the risks together.

When to get more help

If you are worried about your child's behaviour, or if it's affecting school life, their (or your) finances, or if their mental health is declining, it's time to get them some help.

Where to get more help

The GP is a good place to start, and they may be able to refer your child to a local support or treatment service.

There are also lots of charities that are dedicated to advising, helping and supporting people with drug, alcohol and vaping issues.

FRANK offers help, advice and honest information about drugs. They also have a helpline for anyone to call. 0300 123 6600 talktofrank.com

Hope UK equip young people to make drug-free choices. hopeuk.org

Adfam work to improve life for families affected by drug and alcohol use. adfam.org.uk

We Are With You provide confidential support to people experiencing issues with drugs, alcohol or mental health. wearewithyou.org.uk



Smoke-Free helps and guides people to quit smoking or vaping. There's a teen guide too.

Want to know more?



Care for the Family: a useful video about what to do if you think your child is experimenting with drugs or alcohol.



Young Minds have a page that discusses various addictions, and signposts towards specialist organisations.



Sex and Pornography

Statistics show that half the children who have seen pornography have seen it by the time they are 14, and 10% have seen it by the time they are just 9 years old. And it's no longer on the top shelf, or adult channels, it's on their phones and in their pockets. It's also no longer as tame as it was 30 years ago, it often includes aggression, rape, violence and degradation.

Most teenagers get their information and advice from friends or the internet at this age, but when it comes to sex, parents are still a source of information – even passively. Having conversations with our children about sex, relationships and pornography is vital for this generation, as what they learn from the internet is not a true or healthy view of sexual relationships.

Having conversations with our children about sex, relationships and pornography is vital for this generation.

Conversation starters

“

I want to chat to you about something really important. We'll probably chat about this a few times as you get older, but talking about it for the first time feels weird...

“

I know you're likely to have seen porn at some point, it's practically everywhere! So, here's what you need to know about it...

“

This TV programme shows a lot of people who are either wanting to have sex or about to! What do you think about having sex so early on in a relationship or without really knowing the person first?

“

If your child shuts the conversation down:

That's OK, I can see why you'd find this conversation a bit awkward. But, just so you know, you can always come to me when you feel ready.

What you can do to help

It's never too late to have the conversation. Starting the conversation is the hardest part, and once you have made it possible to talk about it, your child may return to the conversation well into adulthood.

Don't panic. Keep calm, take a deep breath, and try to be open.

Reassure, and sound reassuring. This conversation isn't meant to sound like a telling-off, so try to keep any judgement out of your tone.

Listen. This conversation is much better if you do less lecturing, and more listening. If they ask for your opinion, give it, but ask them theirs too.

Return to it again. It's a good idea to have this conversation a few times over the years, as their beliefs and knowledge will change, and you can help them with new challenges.

Want to know more?



Young Minds have a page that discusses various addictions, and signposts towards specialist organisations.



Care for the Family have some honest videos round table discussion on porn, and early sexual relationships.



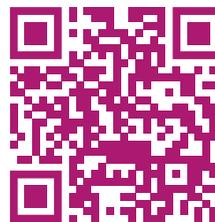
NSPCC advice and support for parents and carers including staying safe online, sex and relationships.



The P Conversation has downloadable guides for parents to start and channel conversations.



Lucy Faithfull Foundation help parents and carers protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation. Helpline: 0808 1000 900



CEOP help children, young people, parents and professionals with advice about sex, relationships and the internet.

Disordered Eating

Disordered eating can take many forms, its causes are complex and is rooted in mental illness, rather than just a desire to control weight. Eating disorders are often about controlling or blocking out uncomfortable thoughts. You might not get to the bottom of what started it off, but simply accept that your child has a mental health issue and focus on the road to recovery.

It can be hard to know how to tackle it, and how to behave as a family around the subject of eating and weight. Generally, modelling a healthy relationship with food (normal portion sizes, healthy choices) is a good place to start. Avoid talking about weight – yours or anybody's – is a sensible rule of thumb.



What you can do to help

If your child has a difficult relationship with food, then starting a conversation could be a good place to begin.

Choose a time and place to have the conversation; avoid meal times, and choose a place where you won't be interrupted.

Don't just talk about food, or weight. Focus on how they are, and ask open questions about how they are feeling, rather than telling them they need help.

Be calm in the face of their reaction. However supportive your approach, you may still provoke an angry reaction. Don't be disheartened, reassure them that you are on their side.

Revisit the topic. If the conversation didn't go smoothly, it would be tempting to not raise it again. But keeping quiet won't help them long term, and eating disorders prosper in secrecy.

If they admit they need help, act on it. Don't delay, but offer to see the GP with them as soon as you can arrange it.

If they reassure you that everything is ok, trust your instinct. You were worried for a reason, so keep your eye on them for a while and go back and talk about it again. Denying there's a problem is a symptom of some eating disorders.

Do not underestimate the value of your support. If things in their life feel out of control, your constant love and support will make a big difference. Reassure them that you love them and are here for them. You will be the biggest asset in their recovery.

Conversation starters

“

I care about you and want to make sure you're okay. Can we talk about how things are going with food and meals?

“

It's okay if this feels difficult to talk about. I'm here to listen whenever you're ready.

“

It sounds like meals have been really challenging for you. Can you share a little more about how you're feeling during or after eating?

“

I want you to know that I'm not upset or judging you—I just want to help you feel better.

“

It seems like food and eating have become a tricky subject lately. I just want to understand how you're feeling about it.

When to get more help

If you are concerned that your child has some of these symptoms, start by reading more about the subject, and then talk to them about how they feel about it.

- Weight changes
- Secrecy around food
- Exercising more than usual
- Going to the toilet after meals
- Poor skin
- Scars on fingers, knuckles, or backs of hands, and bad breath from being sick
- Feeling bad about their body image
- Worry about gaining weight
- Not seeing their body the way you do
- Feeling dizzy or faint
- Wearing baggy clothes to hide their body shape
- Feeling cold
- Isolating themselves from others



Where to get more help

After you have talked to your child, if they agree to seeing the GP, act on it straight away. BEAT have a '[Seeing the GP Guide](#)' here.

Want to know more?



BEAT has a guide for parents and carers



Family Lives has information on eating disorders



NHS Guide for parents, on disordered eating



Young Minds have a guide about eating disorders



Care for the Family have a discussion on supporting a child with an eating disorder



Sexuality & Gender Identity

Many teenagers begin to question and explore their sexuality and gender identity, this is perfectly normal at this stage of their life, working through their own feelings of attraction, understanding their own sexuality and how they identify.

They might be exploring their sexual orientation (a person's sexual orientation, or sexuality, is the part of their identity that relates to who they find attractive), or their gender identity (a person's gender identity is the gender that they identify with).

This may be a difficult conversation for teens to broach with parents and wider family, and may be challenging for the adults too.



Conversation Starters

“

I've noticed that you have been dressing differently?
Is there anything that prompted that change?

“

You know it's ok if you ever want to talk about sexuality or gender identity with me, I'm here to listen if you want to talk about it

“

Do you think that when [celebrity] was a teen they sat down and talked to their parents about their [sexuality/gender identity], how would you feel if we talked about it?

“

How do you feel about the way people see you versus how you see yourself?

What you can do to help

Starting the conversation takes courage, so above all **remember to listen and respond in a respectful, loving and gentle way**. Open dialogue is a privilege, and easy to break.

Take your time – no decisions need to take place quickly, or even at all. Exploring identity is natural and as puberty comes along, it may resolve many of their questions or feelings.

It's OK not to have all the answers. Your child may look to you to help them understand who they are, and at times we might not know quite how to help, and that's OK. Your open conversations will be enough to help them at this stage, and being supportive will make a huge difference in their journey.

Ask if it's ok to ask – you might have questions about their sexual identity, which may or may not be changed, but ask if you can talk about it, and be respectful. Remember how you would have felt if your parent had asked you.



When to get more help

If your child is consistently identifying with a different gender, it may affect their mood and cause them significant distress. It may make them anxious, withdrawn, depressed or become angry or self-harm. In these situations, it's important for your child to see their GP to discuss it. Going through puberty can make these feelings worse, as they may not identify with their gender as they develop adult bodies. It might be best to speak to the GP before they reach puberty so that they can be supported as their bodies change.

Your child can be referred to the NHS Children and Young People's Gender Service by the GP or other professionals, although the waiting list is long.

Look out for other issues – they may be being bullied, or have disordered eating, self-harm or thoughts of suicide. Ask open, direct questions, and seek help from their GP if necessary.

Want to know more?



The NHS have information for parents whose child identifies as a different gender.



Care for the Family have a video for parents on this topic.



The Proud Trust is an LGBTQ+ organisation that supports LGBTQ+ young people.



Young Minds have a guide for parents on gender identity.



Reach Out has information for parents practical tips to support their child and understand what they're going through

Neurodivergence

Neurodivergence is an umbrella term that encompasses conditions including Autism, ADHD/ADD, dyslexia, dyscalculia and dyspraxia.

Despite more people becoming aware of these conditions, there is still a lot of stigma surrounding neurodivergence and many people face bullying, discrimination, and feel marginalised. Understandably, this can lead to feelings of fear, loneliness, isolation and being misunderstood.

Not only that, but feelings of isolation can be made worse by how humans communicate, interact or interpret feelings or emotions. It can be a confusing place for someone with neurodivergence. Many mental health organisations are championing neurodivergent people, as this group have been identified as being at greater risk of suicide than others.

One of the traits of Autism is 'masking', where autistic people cover up their neurodivergence and assimilate to the world around them. Masking is exhausting – emotionally, mentally and physically. Long term, it can lead to mental health issues, so it's vital that we recognise autism, and encourage them to be themselves.



Conversation Starters

Talking during a meltdown isn't easy, but these are useful conversation starters for when things are calmer.

“

What words would you use to describe how you were feeling before you had the meltdown yesterday?

“

What do you wish people understood about how you were feeling?

“

Sometimes it helps to draw or write about what you're feeling, do you want to try that?

What you can do to help

Listen to your child's world view: Allow your child to show you how complex their life is from their perspective. Ask open questions, and listen to their replies, explore how they see and interpret the world.

Educate others: from grandparents, sports coach or teachers, teach them about what they can do the help your child reduce their social anxiety, sensory issues, noise, etc.

Educate yourself: Learn more about experiences from a neurodivergent viewpoint. Learn from others, there are so many excellent educators on Instagram, or podcasts. There are a number of TV programmes too.

Identify triggers: Meltdowns are often a response to overwhelm, dysregulation and feeling unable to cope. Learn what their triggers are, and help your child to regulate, especially at busy periods like Christmas, or the last week of term.

Create routine: Routine can help make the world more predictable, and reduce uncertainty. This can be especially useful in the school holidays.



“I find it's best to give her one instruction at a time. Less overwhelm, more chance she'll remember, more chance of success.”

Lucy

Praise your child in the small things: Low self-esteem is common in neurodivergent people, so telling your child when they are doing well, could make a big difference.

Rehearse conversations that they may find challenging: Research shows that as many as 80% of people under 40 get anxious before making a phone call, and that's even more challenging for neurodivergent people. Help them to practice conversations they may have with a teacher, the dentist, the bus driver or with grandparents over the phone. You could help them with written prompts.

Speak to their school if they are coming home overwhelmed. For many neurodivergent children, they 'mask' all day, and once they are home the wheels come off and they meltdown. If that's the case, their school need to know so that they can support them more at school to make it less overwhelming. The masking and meltdown cycle is exhausting, and can lead to burnout, which can have longer term consequences for their mental health.



“Noise-cancelling headphones are a lifesaver for him in overwhelming environments.”

Sam

When to get more help

If your child's mental health is not in a good place, you may notice:

- Increase in the number of meltdowns
- Anxious behaviours
- Increased restrictions around food, routines, clothing
- Self-harming (including hair pulling, head banging, picking at skin, or scabs)
- Low mood, low self-esteem

Where to get more help

If your child already has a diagnosis of a neurodivergent condition and their mental health is declining, get back in touch with the GP or directly with the CAMHS team.

You can also contact the NHS mental health crisis line via 111.

Autism Central aims to make it easier to learn more about autism and services available to you.



Ambitious about Autism is a charity advocating for those with autism.



Every Life Matters support directory includes local charities that support autistic people in Cumbria, as well as more information on supporting someone with autism.



Want to know more?

There may be local organisations that can help support you as a family or your child, so it's worth getting in touch with your GP practice, CAMHS or doing a google search for a local or online support group.

Autism Central also have a guide for autistic people on making friends.

Food can be texturally challenging for autistic people. As a result, some autistic people limit food choices, which can lead to poor diet. **Autism Central** have advice on food on restricted eating.

Preparing for secondary school is key for every young person, but helping autistic children to think through the new changes is valuable. **Autism Central** have created this guide.

Challenging behaviour

Young Minds have a guide for helping young people with their ADHD and Mental Health.

Challenging Behaviour have written a guide to help parents understand and deal with challenging behaviour. Really helpful advice when your child is struggling to manage their actions (for example, during a meltdown).

Every Life Matters have lots of advice for parents and carers and young people who self-harm.



Life Events

Some life events can be very exciting, and change can be welcome. But many changes can cause stress, anxiety and worry for young people. Change can be harder to cope with when:

- Events are unexpected
- They don't want it to happen
- They feel out of control of the situation
- They preferred things as they were
- They are already feeling anxious or have low mood.

Conversation Starters

“

I have felt lots of big emotions today, and wondered if you wanted to talk about how you are feeling?

“

When someone mentioned [life event] today, I noticed that you tried to hide how you were feeling. It's ok to feel tearful, and we want to you to know if you feel really sad, you can tell us about it.

“

Would you find it easier to text me about how your day went?

“

What was the best thing about today?
What was the hardest?

What you can do to help

Be there: You are their harbour in a storm, constant and reliable. Try to be consistent so that they can come to you with their worries and feel safe.

Model healthy attitudes to change: As teenagers, they may not have experienced much upheaval, but as adults we have been through many more experiences. Try to model healthy patterns by staying calm, talking to people you trust, being open about the emotions you are experiencing, and reassuring them that those emotions are a normal part of the process of dealing with a big life event.

Be interested: Whilst a life event may be consuming the whole family, try to set time aside to be one-to-one, be interested in their day, delving deeper if you are being fobbed off with 'it was fine.' Use texts, hugs, smiles, small gestures to communicate that you see them, and you are there for them.

Be a sounding board: Big life events can provoke big emotions, and it's easy to react to outbursts with outbursts of your own. Be a calm, safe sounding board, don't take what they say personally, and be quick to reassure and forgive when they have calmed down.

Try to find light relief: There may be moments when you can be silly, make each other laugh, do something normal like cook dinner together. These moments build hope that there is a future.

Try to steady the ship: Keep routine in place where possible, food in the fridge, and the laundry done. These moments can provide reassurance that some things don't change, and can meet their basic needs to feel secure.

You will also be finding these life events hard, so be kind to yourself and make time for you too. Reach out for help for you too. There's plenty of organisations to support you, at the back of this booklet.

When to get more help

You may notice that your child isn't coping with the significant change, and might:

- Increase restrictions around food, routines, clothing
- Self-harm (including hair pulling, picking at skin, or scabs)
- Have low mood, low self-esteem
- Find it difficult to go out of the house
- Is aggressive, angry
- Finds leaving you, or another family member very difficult

Where to get more help

Your **GP** is a gatekeeper for NHS support. Be as honest as you can, and prepare what you and your child want to say in advance. **Mind** have a useful page here.



Family Lives Parents' Line 0808 800 2222 (see website for opening times)



The **NSPCC** Helpline is available on 0808 800 5000 or via help@nspcc.org.uk. Our child protection specialists can offer support and discuss any worries you have.

Your child can contact **Childline** by phone 0800 1111. Or, via the website your child can create an account called a Locker, and through the locker access support by email, or through online 1-2-1 counselling.

Want to know more?

Divorce and Separation:

The **NSPCC** have information for parents on talking about divorce, as well as the legal implications, and contact arrangements.



Young Minds have a resource for parents on how to talk about divorce, and how to support your child through it.



Care for the Family have resources for single parents, and a blog with lots of relevant topics.



Childline have answered lots of questions that young people ask when their parents separate or divorce.



Financial changes:

This **Young Minds** guide has advice on taking care of yourself as well as looking after your child's wellbeing and helping them manage worries about money. You'll also find information about how to find practical and financial support for your family.



Childline has advice for young people who are homeless.



Family Lives has plenty of budgeting advice for families.



Other life events:

Childline have advice for young people who have a parent in prison.



Family Lives have plenty of resources for blended families.



Bereavement:

Childline have written resources for young people who are grieving.



Hope Again is the youth website of **Cruse Bereavement Support**. It is a safe place where young people can learn from each other, how to cope with grief, and feel less alone.



Edward's Trust support adults coping with the loss of a loved one, or a child grieving from the death of someone important to them, or support them whilst someone they love is terminally ill.



Child Bereavement UK helps families to rebuild their lives when a child grieves or when a child dies.



Winston's Wish supports young people who are grieving.



Widowed and Young is a peer-to-peer support charity that supports adults under 50 who are grieving after they have lost their partner.



Young Minds have a parents guide to grief, and how to support your child through it.



Help Them to Help Themselves

The teenage years are a bridge between childhood, where we as parents take care of their needs, to adulthood where they take care of themselves. In this important period, one of the best things we can teach them is where to find help when they need it.

Trusted adults

Teach them the wealth of experience that other adults in their lives have. Encourage those relationships, so that they can ask advice whether they are living away from home, travelling or just had a rough night out with friends. This might be aunts or uncles, grandparents, youth leaders, godparents or members of their sports team.

There are even more places, look at www.every-life-matters.org.uk/support-directory



National Organisations

Another important place for support is reaching out to services that are set up to support their mental health, or their wellbeing. By encouraging them to call Childline, text Shout to 85258, or use Kooth, we are establishing well-trodden paths, so that when a crisis comes in early adulthood, rather than make an irrational decision, they might instead pick up the phone and dial 116 123 (Samaritans).

Apps

They will already have a phone full of apps, so why not encourage them to download a few that can help them with their wellbeing. From Calm Harm, to Tell Mi, there's lots out there for them to try. Whilst you're at it, why not download them too, so that when you recommend them, you know what they do.



Help and Support

The **Anna Freud Centre** offers online resources and support for children, families and schools. www.annafreud.org

CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably) provides support to anyone in the UK who is feeling down and needs to talk or find information. Webchat, or phone 0800 58 58 58 5pm – midnight, 7 days a week. www.thecalmzone.net

Childline has a free service for children Under 19. They can confidentially call, chat online or email Childline about any problem, big or small. Or, via the website your child can create an account called a Locker, and through the locker access support by email, or through online 1-2-1 counselling. Childline can provide a BSL interpreter if they are deaf or hearing-impaired. Or call 0800 11 11. Support available 24/7. www.childline.org.uk

Family Lives provides resources for families on a wide range of issues that families face. Helpline 0808 8002222 Mon- Fri 9am-9pm, weekends 10am-3pm. www.familylives.org.uk

Hub of Hope is a database of local, national, peer and community services all in one place. www.hubofhope.co.uk

Papyrus offers confidential advice and support for young people (under the age of 35) who have thoughts of suicide. Its helpline service - HOPELINEUK - is available to anybody under the age of 35 experiencing thoughts of suicide, or anybody concerned that a young person could be thinking of suicide, 24/7. www.papyrus-uk.org

You can also call 0800 068 4141 or text 07860 039967. Or email pat@papyrus-uk.org.

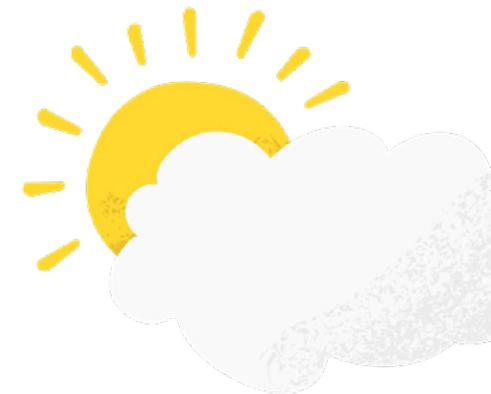
Whatever you're going through, you can contact the **Samaritans** for support. 116 123, 24/7. www.samaritans.org Or email jo@samaritans.org

Shout has a text support service is available 24/7 for anyone, of any age. Text 'shout' to 85258. Their website has resources and information on a wide range of topics. www.giveusashout.org

Suicide Prevention UK have a helpline available 6pm to midnight everyday on 0800 689 5652. www.spuk.org.uk

The Mix offers advice and support for under 25s on mental health, physical health, relationships, drugs etc. Online counselling service also available. Webchat available 4-11pm, Monday – Friday. www.themix.org.uk

Young Minds has lots of information and advice to support young people, parents, or those working with young people. www.youngminds.org.uk



Help and Support for parents

Many parents find it helpful to reach out to other parents so they can talk through how they have handled difficult situations with their children and get support. You can connect with other parents by:

- Using the Charlie Waller Trust directory to see if there's a local parent support group in your area
- Accessing peer and group parent support through www.parentingmentalhealth.com
- Joining Facebook or other online groups
- You can also find support services such as counselling or therapy through your GP and other local organisations, or privately if this is an affordable option for you.



Sometimes it helps just having someone there who can listen to what you're going through – and if you need someone to talk to, you can call the Samaritans anytime on 116 123.

There are even more places, look at www.every-life-matters.org.uk/support-directory



Parenting Helplines

These charities have phone lines that parents can call for advice.



Family Action



Family Lives



Young Minds

Parenting courses



Action for Children run parenting programmes through children's centres.



Care for the Family run parenting courses all over the country, and have a wealth of topics, podcasts and videos online.



Apps

TellMi

A free app for teenagers (11+) providing resources and a fully-moderated community where you can share your problems, get support and help other people too.



Ollee

A virtual friend for 8-11 year olds and their parents that helps families think about feelings and talk about difficult topics.



DistrACT

The app offers self-help tips and links to support and trusted resources for those who self-harm or have thoughts of suicide.



Stem4 have created a series of apps around mental health:

Calm Harm

How to track and resist self-harm urges, many of which could work for thoughts of suicide



Clear Fear

Help to manage anxiety



Move Mood

Helping you to manage low mood and depression



StayAlive

A safety planning app, including a Hope Box, packed full of useful information and tools to help you stay safe in crisis. You can use it if you are having thoughts of suicide or if you are concerned about someone else who may be considering suicide.



My Possible Self

Pick from 10 modules to learn how to manage fear, anxiety and stress, and take control of your thoughts, feelings and behaviour.



STOPP

An app help you to change negative cycles of impulsive behaviour and enables you to make changes to your thoughts, feelings and behaviours to live a more skilful, less impulsive life.



Feeling Good

This app helps you improve your thoughts, feelings, self-esteem and self-confidence using the principles of cognitive behavioural therapy.



SAM (Self-help App for the Mind)

An app to help you understand and manage anxiety.



**Every
life
matters** 

www.every-life-matters.org.uk

Suicide Safer Communities, Training and
Suicide Bereavement Support in Cumbria
Charity No. 1180815