



an overview of mental health

for family and friends

Changes in young people

The journey from childhood to adulthood is full of physical, social, emotional and behavioural changes. With so much happening, it can be difficult to know the difference between normal behaviour such as occasional moodiness and irritability, and an emerging mental health concern. If a young person shows signs of developing a mental health concern it's important they are supported by their family, friends and health professionals early on.

The good news is, with the right support and strategies things can get better for your young person.



Young people and mental health

Good mental health allows us to live life in a positive and meaningful way. It helps us to work or study to our full potential, cope with day-to-day life stresses and be involved in the community.

When a young person experiences good mental health, it helps them be:

- resilient
- flexible
- adaptable
- socially connected.

Feeling down, tense, angry, anxious or moody are all normal emotions, but when these feelings persist for at least a few weeks, or begin to interfere with daily life, they may be part of a mental health concern.

If you think your young person's mental health challenges are impacting on their daily life, it is important to let them know you are there to support them and there are also many professional options available to them.

What affects a young person's mental health?

There is no one cause for mental health concerns. Research tells us that a number of overlapping factors may increase the risk of a young person developing a mental health concern, such as:

- biological factors – family history of mental health concerns
- adverse early life experiences – abuse, neglect, death or significant loss or trauma
- individual psychological factors – self-esteem, perfectionism, coping skills or thinking style
- current circumstances – stress from work or school, money issues, difficult personal relationships, challenges within the family
- serious illness or physical injury
- alcohol and other drugs – use and experimentation.

Signs to look out for

Parents can often tell when something is not quite right – they may notice the way their young person expresses themselves is different, or other changes in their behaviour.

Here are some common signs that might suggest your young person is in need of further support. These include new, noticeable and persistent changes lasting at least a few weeks, such as:

- withdrawing from or not enjoying things they usually do
- changes in appetite or sleeping patterns
- isolating themselves and spending more time alone than normal
- being easily irritated or angry for no apparent reason
- declining performance in school, TAFE, university or work
- loss of energy
- experiencing difficulties with their concentration
- involving themselves in or an increase in risky behaviour, like using alcohol or other drugs
- being unusually stressed, worried, down or crying for no reason
- expressing negative, distressing, bizarre or unusual thoughts.



How to help your young person

Families can provide vital support for young people when they are having a tough time.

Reach out to your young person at a time when everyone seems calm to:

- talk openly and honestly
- let them know you're concerned and ask what they need from you
- show empathy and try to understand their perspective
- avoid judgement and reassure them you're there for them
- take their feelings seriously – don't tell them to 'calm down' or 'get over it'
- encourage them to talk about what's happening in their life and remind them that talking about a problem can help
- spend time together and take an interest in their activities
- discuss their strengths with them and give positive feedback
- listen to their concerns – listen openly and attentively
- check in often with your young person.

Encourage activities that promote good mental health

Tips that promote good mental health include:

- connecting with people
- staying active
- eating well
- cutting back on alcohol and other drugs
- getting into life
- getting enough sleep
- learning new coping skills.

Offer support

Let your young person know there is lots of help available:

- professional support is available for both you and your young person. Help find an appropriate service, such as a [headspace centre](#) or [ehespace](#) and support them to engage
- ask direct questions if you're concerned about suicide. It's OK to ask directly. Research shows that talking about suicide will not make someone carry out the behaviour. You might choose to be specific about what you have seen that's causing you concern.

Self-care for parents

Caring for a loved one who is experiencing a hard time can impact on your health and wellbeing. Get some support by talking to someone you trust and seek professional help if you need it. It's important to look after yourself during these times. By doing so, you're also modelling good self-care for your young person.

Other useful websites

- **Beyond Blue:** 1300 224 636 or [beyondblue.org.au](#)
- **Lifeline:** 13 11 14 or [lifeline.org.au](#)
- **SANE Australia:** 1800 187 263 or [sane.org](#)
- **mindhealthconnect:** 1800 55 1800 or [mindaustralia.org.au/carers](#)
- Parent helplines (in every State and Territory of Australia) - Google 'Parentline' along with your State or Territory



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](#)



If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

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