

MENTAL HEALTH
AND EMOTIONAL
WELLBEING

Butterflies



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“What mental health needs
is more sunlight, more candor,
and more unashamed
conversation.”

-Glenn Close-



Foreword



Supporting mental health and emotional wellbeing of all young people is at the heart of the response of school leaders to the impact of COVID. We want to help secure the long term happiness and well-being of our young people in London.

The 'Butterfly Effect' is the idea that small things can have non-linear impacts on a complex system. The concept is imagined with a butterfly flapping its wings in China and, as a result, London would experience sunshine instead of rain.

As schools we are ideally placed to promote good emotional well-being and identify early behaviour changes and signs of mental distress. We have produced these mental health and emotional well-being support ideas for you to support your parents and students so we can move forward with confidence and hope.

To effectively tackle mental health and emotional wellbeing, a whole school approach is crucial.

The Whole School Approach means all members of the school community feel responsible and play an active role in tackling this important issue and thereby improve student learning, behaviour and wellbeing.

We have compiled the most useful advice from government agencies, charities and mental health experts to support schools and families.

Let 'us' know how you get on...

Jacqueline Valin

CEO Southfields Academy Trust

www.southfieldsacademy.com



Image Credit: Image referenced from a Public Health England document: Promoting Children and Young People's Emotional health and Wellbeing - A Whole School Approach. [Published March 2015](#)



“Just when the caterpillar
thought the world was ending,
she become a butterfly.”

-Unknown-



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Mental Health & Emotional Wellbeing - *Simple Guidance for Parents & Carers*

**“There is no health without
mental health; mental health is
too important to be left to the
professionals alone, and mental
health is everyone’s business.”**

-Vikram Patel-

There's no doubt about it - Physical health and mental health are two halves of the same coin - they cannot be separated. Ups and downs in physical and mental health are a normal part of life. **We all have mental health**, but there is still much **stigma** attached to talking about it.



Image Credit:
unsplash.com

If you broke your arm, you'd go to the doctor, right? Would you do the same if you had uncontrollable anxiety? Or felt depressed for no reason? What if your child experienced those things? Many people suffer in silence when it comes to mental health, but you can choose a different path.

**“Mental health needs a great deal of attention.
It's the final taboo and it needs to be faced and dealt with.”**

-Adam Ant-

Mental health problems affect around one in four people in the UK (with 75% starting before the age of 18.) However, just like we all catch colds from time to time, many of us experience passing mental health issues such as low-level anxiety, low-mood, and stress-related sleep problems that resolve with self-care. More serious problems range from **depression** and debilitating **anxiety**, to rarer problems such as **schizophrenia**, **bipolar disorder** and **eating disorders**. If you think your mental health needs attention beyond mere lifestyle changes, please **speak to your GP**.



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Just like there are many things we can do to improve our physical health, we can do a lot to boost our mental health. In the pages that follow you will find practical guidance peppered with links to support services, videos, articles, webinars, and ideas to help you and your family be the best they can be - body and mind

20%

of adolescents may experience a mental health problem in any given year.

Statistics quoted from: www.mentalhealth.org.uk

70%

of children and adolescents who experience mental health problems have not had appropriate interventions at a sufficiently early age

Remember the Oxygen Rule

If you've ever flown on an aeroplane you've heard the safety announcement: *"If there's a drop in cabin pressure, oxygen masks will drop from above. Be sure to put your own mask on before helping your children."* If you are concerned about your child's well-being remember this rule! You will not have the capacity to help them if you don't help yourself first.

"When you say 'yes' to others make sure you are not saying 'no' to yourself."

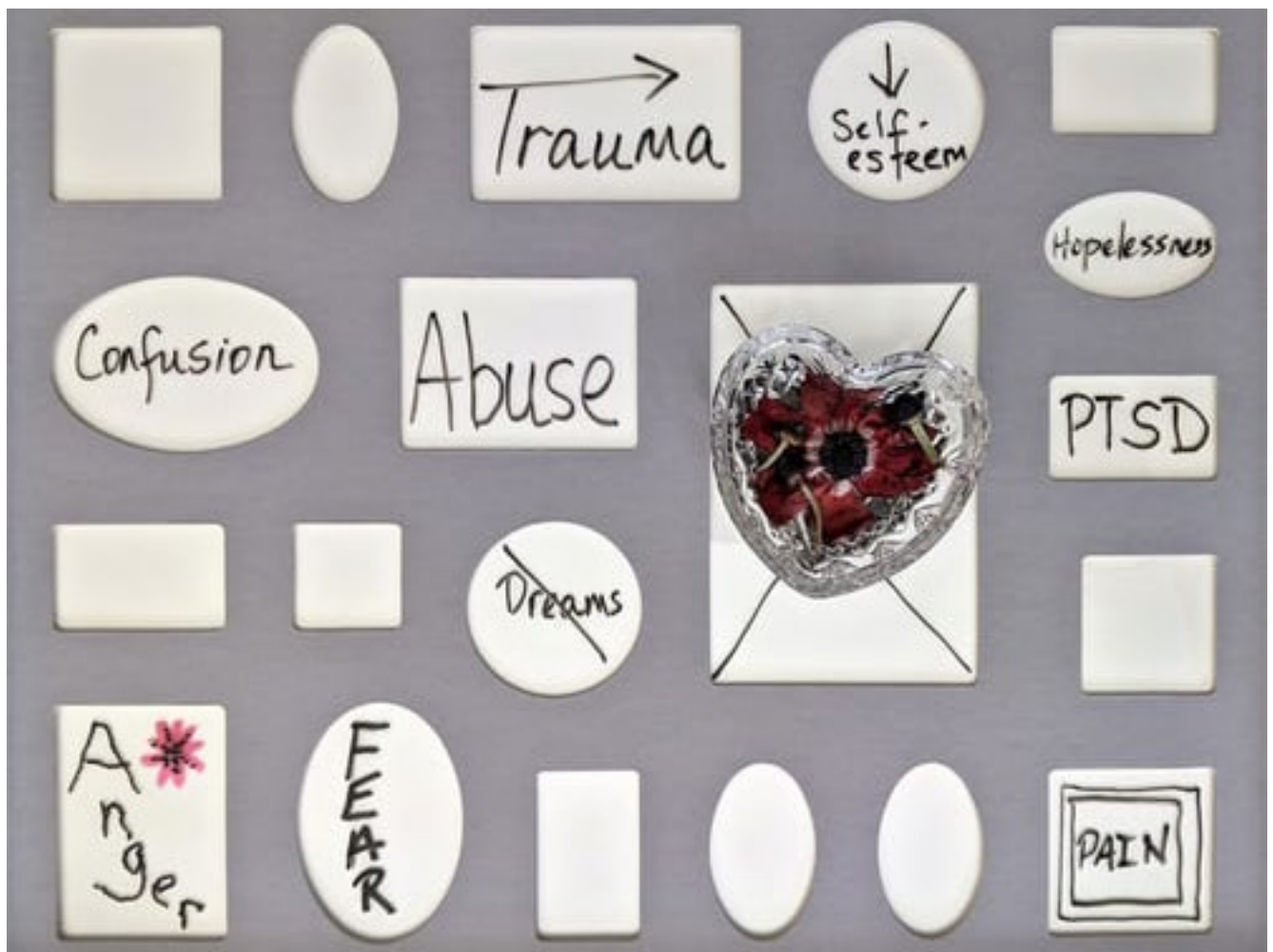
-Paulo Coelho-



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What is Good Mental Health?

Image Credit:
unsplash.com



“You don’t have to be positive all the time. It’s perfectly okay to feel sad, angry, annoyed, frustrated, scared and anxious. Having feelings doesn’t make you a negative person. It makes you human.”

-Lori Deschene-



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Good mental health is not the absence of ever feeling bad - rather it is the ability to:

- **Feel, express and manage a range of positive and negative emotions**
- **Form and maintain good relationships with others**
- **Cope with and manage change and uncertainty**
- **Learn and grow**
- **Have healthy self-esteem (not always blame yourself)**
- **Set goals and feel hopeful about your life and future**

If any of these categories made you pause, read on for tips to looking after your mental health, adapted from the [Mental Health Foundation](#).

HOPELESS

Image Credit:
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1

Talk About It

“Anything that’s human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary.”

-Fred Rogers-

Talking about your feelings is not a sign of weakness - it's part of taking charge of your well-being and doing what you can to stay healthy. Putting feelings into words helps put things into perspective, often brings fresh insight, and makes what seems unspeakable more manageable.



Image Credit:
unsplash.com

Problems carried around in your head can become a heavy burden, but sharing with someone who really listens can help you feel supported, less alone, and feel better. And it works both ways - if you are honest about your struggles, it might encourage others to do the same. There's [scientific evidence](#) to back this up!

If someone opens up to you, the key to being a good listener is not to interrupt or try to tell them that their worries are 'no big deal' - it won't help and it might make them feel dismissed. Instead [listen with empathy](#). Unless they ask, most people don't want you to solve their problems, they just want to be heard.

Too often when people ask us how we're doing we simply say, "*fine*" or "*not too bad.*" Perhaps next time you are asked, challenge yourself to pause and really consider what's going on inside, like the folks in this [video](#).



Image Credit:
unsplash.com

If you suspect your child is hurting, here are some [tips](#) on starting a conversation. Remind yourself that all emotions are okay - they are just messengers. If you would like to see an example of how to allow all feelings a place, even the hard ones, check out this video clip from the film 'Inside/Out': [Bingbong and Sadness](#).

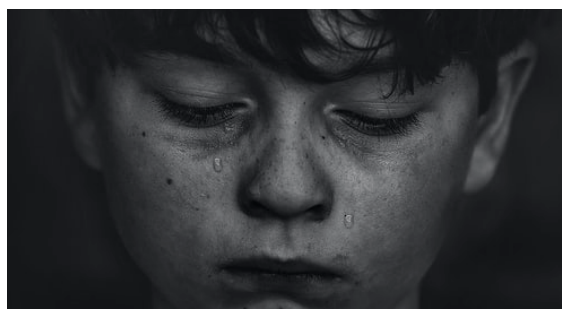


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2

Keep Active

"Making **Excuses**
Burns **Zero**
Calories Per Hour."

-UNKNOWN-



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Being inactive can keep you stuck in a bad place both physically and mentally. Moving your body, whether by doing sport, going to the gym, taking walks in the park, gardening or even doing housework, releases chemicals in your brain that make you feel good.

Regular exercise can boost your self-esteem and help you concentrate, sleep and feel better. This applies equally to kids, teens, adults and the elderly.

If you're not much of a workout person, try incorporating more movement into your day with ["exercise snacks"](#), a few simple [yoga poses](#), or a quick bounce on a [mini-trampoline](#) (a surprisingly fun and easy way to get your heart pumping. Or why not join your kids get the whole family moving with some [Joe Wicks Body Coach TV](#) workouts?



Image Credit: unsplash.com



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If you need some motivation, check out these resources and ideas:

["How to Get Mental Health Movement Moments into Your Day"](#)

["5 Ways to Get Moving to Feel Better"](#)

["11 Motivation Tricks"](#)



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3

Eat Well

"Your **diet** is a bank account. Good **food choices** are good **investments**."

-BETHENNY FRANKEL-

We know that food impacts our physical health, but did you know that it also affects our mental health? [Food and mood](#) is a growing area of research.



Image Credit: unsplash.com

A recent [study](#) in the British Medical Journal found that healthy eating patterns, such as the [Mediterranean diet](#), are associated with better mental health than eating a “typical Western diet” that includes takeaways, deep-fried foods, lots of ‘simple’ carbohydrates (such as white breads and pastas), too much sugar, and not enough fruits and vegetables. Diet affects your blood sugar, your immunity, and the microbes in your gut which play a vital role in your mental and physical well-being. And the good news is, it’s not hard (or expensive) to make [simple changes](#) to the way you eat.



Image Credit: The Food Standards Agency 'Eatwell Guide' Booklet,
(www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/the-eatwell-guide-and-resources)

If you're trying to feed your family well on a limited budget, check out these [amazing ideas](#) from "cooking on a bootstrap" chef Jack Monroe, or visit the [MOB kitchen](#) for great recipes that feed four for less than £10.

MOB KITCHEN

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Drink Sensibly

“First you take a drink,
then the drink takes a
drink, then the drink
takes you.”

-F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby-

Did you know that alcohol is a depressant? When the drink wears off, you feel worse because of the way it affects your brain and body. You can literally [drink yourself sad](#). Thus drinking is not a good way to manage difficult feelings.

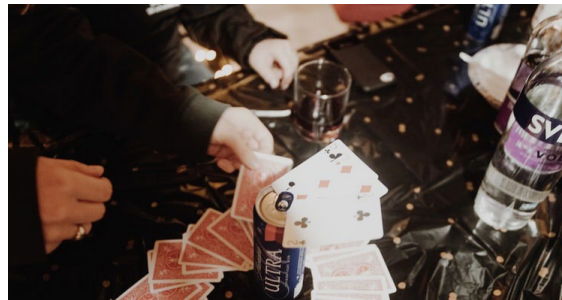


Image Credit:
unsplash.com

The [newest guidance](#) on drinking recommends no more than 14 units per week for both women and men. What does 14 units look like: six pints of beer or six medium glasses of wine. Not a lot!

Drinking has an even bigger impact on young people and their developing brain, and can make them four-times more likely to experience alcohol addiction later in life. Watch this [video](#) with your teenager, and remember that being a good role model is the most powerful way to teach.

8%

of teenagers drank alcohol in the last week

22%

of teenagers who drank alcohol in the past week had drunk 15 units or more

Statistics quoted from: [The Health and Social Care Information Centre's 2014 report documents the drinking habits of teenagers.](#)



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Image Credit: unsplash.com

“Research indicates that the average age a person first tries alcohol is now 13. Alcohol can have serious effects on developing brains and bodies, as well as leaving teenagers vulnerable to unsafe situations.”

-Drinkaware.co.uk-

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Stay Connected

“Life doesn’t make any sense without interdependence. We need each other, and the sooner we learn that, the better for us all.”

-Eric Erickson-

Strong family ties or supportive friendships help you feel cared for and included, and can offer different perspectives from whatever's going on inside your head. They can help keep you active, keep you grounded, and help you solve practical problems.



Image Credit:
unsplash.com

Make a call, connect on Facetime, set up a group Zoom chat, or take a walk with a pal. Or, if you are feeling lonely and need someone to talk to, there are many [befriending](#) organisations in the UK that can pair you with a new friend, or you can join in a group chat through mental health champion Ruby Wax's [Frazzled Cafe](#) organisation. However you do it, [stay connected](#)!



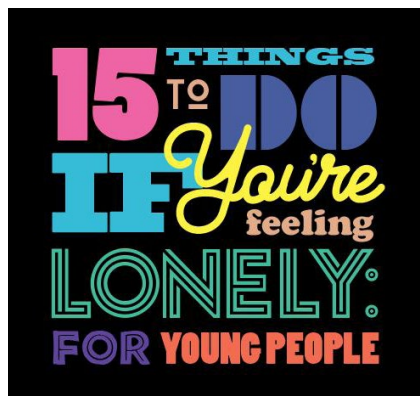
Image Credit:
unsplash.com

On the flip side, think carefully about being around someone who is damaging your mental health. Emotional abuse is insidious and often ignored - know the [signs](#). You don't have to put up with it.



Image Credit: unsplash.com

Young people are uber-connected thanks to social media, instant messaging, and online gaming, but ironically they are [lonelier than ever](#). Research has shown that high use of the internet is linked to [loneliness, social anxiety and depression](#) *except when it's used to maintain existing relationships* and is balanced with offline interactions. In other words, it should not replace friendships “IRL”, and it’s not a great way to make meaningful new friendships. Click below for 15 things to do if you’re feeling lonely!



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Ask for Help

“Sometimes in life you can fall down holes you can’t climb out of by yourself. That’s what friends and family are for - to help. They can’t help, however, unless they know you’re down there.”

-F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby-



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How willing are you to ask for help? It is a vulnerable choice, especially when you're used to "*being strong*." How do you know when it's time to ask for help?



Image Credit:
unsplash.com

When your inner resources are being overwhelmed you can become frozen by feelings of anxiety, have outbursts of anger and frustration, or experience periods of sadness and depression that don't let up. When that happens it's a good time to review your stress-relievers:

Are there things that used to help but don't any longer?
Are you experiencing a breakdown in a key relationship?
Is your health being looked after sensibly?

It helps to discern between the stressors you have some control over, and the ones you don't. None of us are superhuman. We all get tired or overwhelmed sometimes by how we feel or when things go wrong. If you can't cope, ask for help.

Did you know that over [a third of visits to GPs are about mental health](#)? Your local doctor can refer you to a counsellor, or you may prefer to seek on-line support from organisations such as [Together All](#), or get advice from [Good Thinking](#). The UK is rich with [local services](#) dedicated to helping with all sorts of problems.

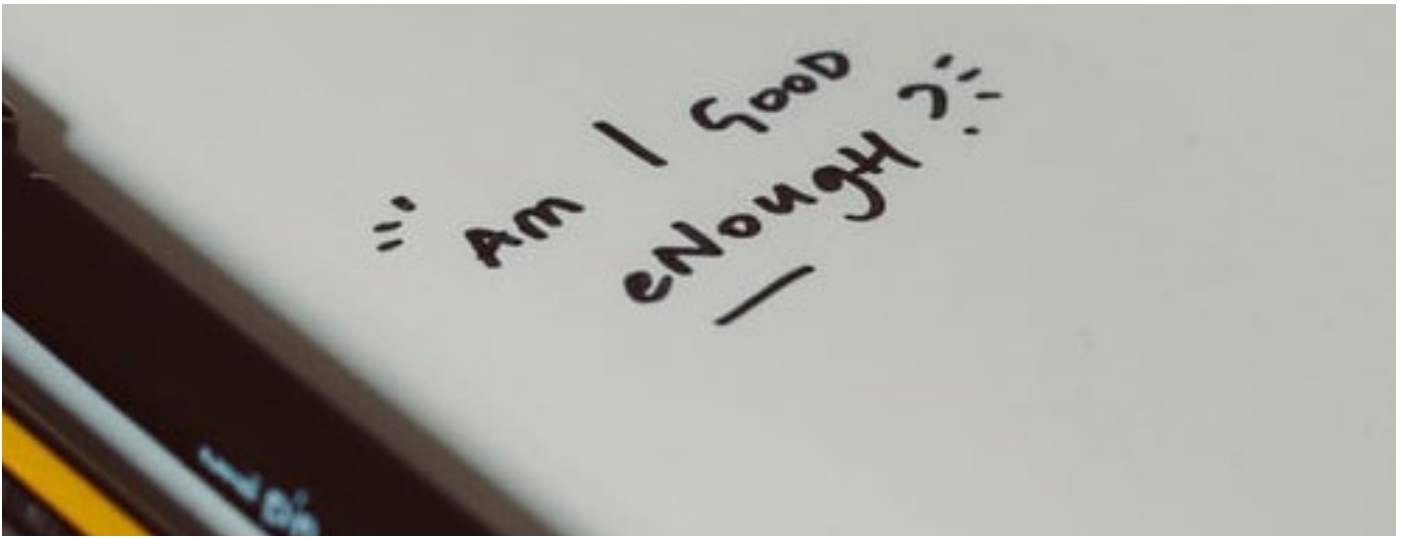


Image Credit: unsplash.com

There are also many resources for children and young people as well. Your GP may refer your child to the [Child and Young People Mental Health Service](#) (CYPMHS, formerly CAMHS) where they can access mental health professionals such as psychiatrists and psychologists as well as specialty services for issues such as gender identity, eating disorders, trauma and more.

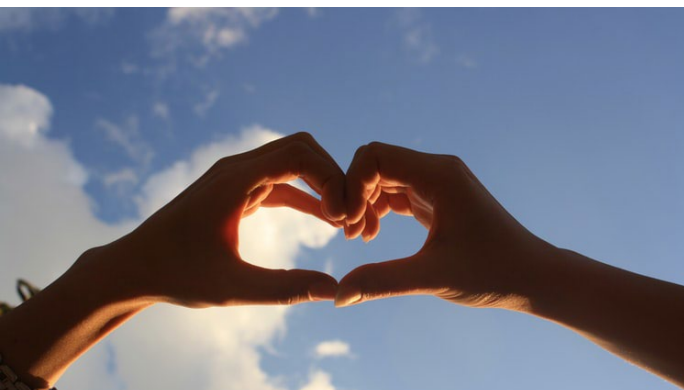


Image Credit: unsplash.com

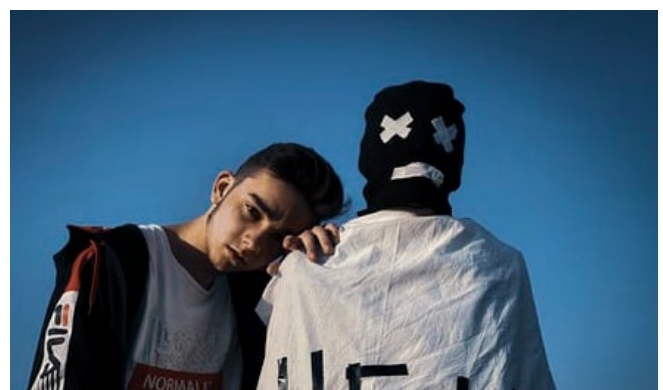


Image Credit: unsplash.com

Schools are another good resource as many offer counselling services and other types of support that do not require a visit with your GP. Reach out to your child's Head-of-Year, tutor to find out what their school has to offer.

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Take a Break

“The little things?
The little moments?
They aren’t little.”

-Jon Kabat-Zinn-

A change of pace or a short break from routine is good for your mental health. It could mean a five-minute pause from cleaning your kitchen, a half-hour lunch break at work, or a weekend exploring somewhere new.



Image Credit: unsplash.com

Another way to take a break is to practice [mindfulness](#). Don't let the term 'mindfulness' put you off - at its simplest mindfulness is just a tool to make you feel better by putting distractions aside and paying attention to what is happening around and inside you.



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Image Credit:
unsplash.com

It can involve meditation, but it doesn't have to. Here are a few mindfulness tips from the charity [Mind](#):

- **Mindful eating** - pay attention to the taste, sight and textures of what you eat. For example, when drinking a cup of tea or coffee, focus on how hot and liquid it feels on your tongue, how sweet it tastes, or watch the steam that it gives off.
- **Mindful moving, walking or running** - notice the feeling of your body moving. You might notice the breeze against your skin, the feeling of your feet or hands against different textures on the ground or nearby surfaces, and the different smells around you.
- **Body scan** - move your attention slowly through different parts of the body, starting from the top of your head moving all the way down to the end of your toes. You could focus on feelings of warmth, tension, tingling or relaxation of different parts of your body.
- **Mindful colouring and drawing** - focus on the colours and the sensation of your pencil/pen against the paper. You could use a mindfulness colouring book, doodle, or draw your own image.

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Do Something
You're Good At

“Do anything, but let it
produce joy.”

-Walt Whitman-

Enjoying yourself helps shift your mood, beat stress, and boosts your self esteem. And what is more enjoyable than doing something you're good at? It also feels great to have an activity where you're not seen as someone's mum or dad, partner, employee, or kid. You're just you.

What are you good at? Are there activities that you used to enjoy but have given up due to the circumstances of your life? Or perhaps there's something you've always wanted to try? Consider these:

- Play a musical instrument
- Join a special interest club
- Sing in a choir
- Make art or craft
- Join a sports team
- Hone your cooking or baking skills



Image Credit: unsplash.com

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Accept Who You
(and Your Kids) Are

“Always remember
that you are absolutely
unique. Just like
everyone else.”

-Margaret Mead-

Everyone is a genius. But If you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree it will live its whole life thinking it's stupid." So the saying goes. And it's true. We're all different, and it's much healthier to accept our uniqueness than to wish we were more like someone else.



Image Credit: unsplash.com

Accepting your children as they are is equally important. Having unrealistic expectations, especially for those who struggle with school work or have special education needs, makes kids more prone to academic anxiety. Equally so, high-achievers, particularly young people who are perfectionists or whose parents have very high ambitions for them, often experience anxiety from fear of failure.

The pressure to do well (whether real or imagined) can affect [children's ability to sleep](#), which in turn can undermine their mental health as well as lead to [anxiety attacks](#) and [depression](#).

It's much healthier to accept that some people are academic, some are good at working with their hands, some make people laugh, some are good at maths, and some cook fantastic meals. Recognising and accepting who you are and what you're good at is the foundation of healthy self-esteem. The same goes for your kids.



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Images Credit: unsplash.com

So what are you good at? Are you a fish trying to climb a tree, or do recognise that you're an excellent swimmer? Is there anything you want to change? If so, are your expectations for yourself or your children realistic? If they are, work towards change with small, manageable steps.

Here's a wonderful video clip from the film [Kung Fu Panda 3](#) on the power of using your natural talents rather than trying to be someone you're not.

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10

Care for Others

“I feel the capacity to care is the thing which gives life its deepest significance.”

-Pablo Casals-

When you care for others you shift your focus from only thinking about your own problems - it gets you out of your own head. Helping others is an important part of maintaining nourishing relationships, plus it can make you feel needed and valued, and boost your self-esteem.

Caring for a pet can improve your wellbeing too. The bond between you and your pet can be as strong as between people. Looking after an animal can bring structure to your day and act as a link to other people. Lots of people make friends by chatting to fellow dog walkers!



Images Credit: unsplash.com



Helping others also helps you see the world from another angle, something that can put your own problems in perspective. If you need ideas about how you can help care for others, consider becoming a volunteer or a befriender.

Find out more about volunteering at www.do-it.org.uk.

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11

Helping Your Children with Their Mental Health

“The way we talk to our
children becomes their
inner voice.”

-Peggy O'Mara-

As the national trend shifts away from 'stiff upper lip' to talking more freely about our feelings and problems, more and more young people are opening up about their struggles with poor mental health.



Image Credit: unsplash.com

The way we approach the topic with our children makes a huge difference to their willingness to be honest about their struggles.

Although schools are making emotional wellbeing a top priority and have lots of resources on hand, parents can feel overwhelmed and helpless when a child is having a hard time. It can be scary to initiate a conversation - you may even have tried and failed. **The biggest mistake parents make is trying to talk when either they or their child is upset.** This does not work. **Why?** In the next chapter we take a look at the teenage brain.

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12

Understanding the Teenage Brain

*"I was a teenage boy once too,
you know." Uncle Mort said,
popping back up. "I know what
your brain looks like.
It's a three-ring circus in there."*

-Gina Damico-

You have surely noticed that young people in general are more emotional and reactive than adults. This is not because of hormones (although they do play a role), it is because of their brains.



Image Credit: unsplash.com

In fact, the part of the brain that allows humans to control impulses and emotions is considered immature into the mid-twenties. This accounts for all sorts of risky behaviours, emotional outburst, obsessional friendships, and seemingly irrational decisions that young people make.

Why would nature play this cruel trick on parents everywhere? According to developmental neuroscientists, this is a necessary step in moving young people towards independence and away from their parents. (Learn more [here](#).) Knowing some of the mechanics of teenage brain development can help you communicate with your child in a more effective way.



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Image Credit:
unsplash.com

**Think of the human brain
as having three parts:**

Upstairs

The thinking
brain

The Landing

The feeling
brain

Downstairs

The reacting
brain



Image Credit: unsplash.com

Upstairs - the thinking brain

- Think before you act
- Are in control of your body and reactions
- Can see other people's point of view (empathy)
- Have self awareness
- Think before speaking
- Can focus, concentrate and work.

Downstairs - the reacting brain

- Act before you think
- Not in control of your body and reactions,
- Only see a problem from your own point of view, Lose access to self-awareness (because you are not thinking!)
- Yell, scream, cry, argue, or run away
- Feel too irritated or stressed to concentrate or work

When you are in your "upstairs" brain you have access to thinking and reasoning; when you are in your "downstairs" brain you are reacting, not thinking (aka the 'fight/flight/freeze response'); and when you are on the "landing" your emotions influence which way you go.

People of all ages move between these parts of the brain occasionally, but because teenagers are waiting for their thinking brain to mature, they spend more time hanging out on the 'landing' being ruled by the emotional part of their brain. And when the emotional brain gets fired up, they 'fall down the stairs', lose connection to their 'upstairs'/thinking brain end up in their downstairs'/reacting brain. (This is sometimes called ['flipping your lid'](#).)

When this happens remember - **they are not thinking, they are reacting!** That's why it's never a good idea to try and reason with them when they are upset - they won't take on board what you are saying until they have calmed down and regained access to their thinking brain. This is true for adults as well, which is why you should not try to have rational conversations when you are upset either.



Image Credit: unsplash.com

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13

Common Mental Health Problems

“Mental health problems don’t define who you are. They are something you experience. You walk in the rain and you feel the rain, but, importantly, **YOU ARE NOT THE RAIN.**”

-Matt Haig-

Mental health and emotional wellbeing exists on a spectrum for us all - we all have good and bad days. But sometimes bad days stretch into weeks, months or longer, and become something more.

Knowledge is power; knowing some basic facts about common mental health issues that arise in young people can make you feel more confident about helping your children when they are struggling.



Image Credit: unsplash.com

The following chapters are problems to watch out for, along with tips and resources for supporting your children when they do.

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14

Anxiety

“Our anxiety does not come from thinking about the future, but from wanting to control it.”

-Khalil Gibran-

Anxiety is the most common mental health concern for children and adults. It can emerge in a number of forms including Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD), Social Anxiety Disorder, Panic Disorder, Phobias, OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder), and PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), among others. (See a full list [here](#).)



Image Credit:
unsplash.com

Not all children who experience anxiety have a diagnosable condition, so don't panic if your child is anxious. Sometimes parents don't realise their child is anxious as they may be quiet and compliant, thus flying under the parent/teacher radar. Other young people are clingy or quick to throw tantrums; excessively shy or worry a lot; complain of tummy or headaches; have panic attacks.

Sensitive parenting can go a long way in soothing anxious children and help them feel more confident. Here is some advice from [Relate](#):

- **Set a routine** - specific times for meals, homework, quiet time, and bedtime. A bedtime routine may include a bath, reading (alone or together), or just time to chat.
- **Reduce stress** - tension in your home can have a negative effect on your child. Set aside a little time each day to do something fun. Reduce arguments by holding family meetings.
- **Encourage independence** - it's tempting to want to do things for your child, but letting them do things by themselves is setting them up for life. Giving your child their own responsibilities in the home is a great way to help them be more independent.
- **Take risks** - Encourage your child to try some experiments such as making a phone call, talking to an unfamiliar classmate, or asking a question to a shop assistant.
- **Build self confidence** - It's important to praise your child for his or her accomplishments and for facing their fears. Involve your child in activities that help him or her feel proud such as a sport or youth club.



Image Credit:
unsplash.com

If you are worried about your child's anxiety, by all means speak to your GP. They may refer them for specialist help (via [CYPMHS](#)) such as [Cognitive Behavioural Therapy](#), or other talking therapies.

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Depression

“Depression is being colour blind and constantly told how colourful the world is.”

-Atticus-



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It is not uncommon for people to say, “I’m so *depressed*” in an offhand way. But true clinical depression is different from just feeling low or bad; it often comes out of the blue and just doesn’t shift (lasting for weeks, months, or longer) leaving the young person feeling hopeless and unhappy. This video explains it well.



Image Credit:
unsplash.com

“Being a teenager can be tough. There are changes taking place in your body and brain that can affect how you learn, think and behave. And if you are facing tough or stressful situations, it is normal to have emotional ups and downs.

But if you have been overwhelmingly sad for a long time (a few week to months) and you’re not able to concentrate or do the things you usually enjoy, you may want to talk to a trusted adult about depression.”

Quote from NIH: The National Institute of Mental Health: Teen Depression



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Image Credit: unsplash.com

Teenage depression signs and symptoms:

- An increase in irritability/hostility/angry outbursts
- Feeling tearful, miserable, lonely, hopeless, or numb most of the time
- Sleeping excessively or struggling to sleep - no energy either way
- Loss of motivation for school or even activities they used to enjoy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Not wanting to have discussions about their future
- Being very self-critical (or taking things personally in a negative or pessimistic way)
- Loss of interest in food or comfort eating
- Lapse in personal hygiene
- Self-harm or suicidal thoughts

If you suspect your child is depressed, here are 10 tips for supporting them from [Young Minds](#):

YOUNG MINDS

The voice for young people's **mental health** and wellbeing

- **Talk to them** in a caring and non-judgemental way; let them know that you've noticed they don't seem very happy
- **Listen and provide emotional support** without asking too many questions or trying to solve their problems. Let them know they can talk to you anytime and for as long as they need to.
- **Try again another day** if they don't want to talk; let them know you're there when they're ready to talk.
- **Think together** about whether there's anything in particular that's making them feel this way. Are there changes that could be made at home or school that would make things easier?
- **Encourage them to speak to someone else** if they can't talk to you – while reassuring them that you'll still be there.



Image Credit: [unsplash.com](#)



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- **Support them to keep routines**, activities and connections with other people going as much as possible, and encourage them to do the things they enjoy – whether that’s exercising, listening to music, doing something creative like colouring or drawing, watching a favourite film, reading a favourite book, or going for a walk with you.
- **Help them with their daily routine**. This includes getting enough sleep and getting up at a regular time, eating regular meals, doing exercise, drinking water, spending quality time with loved ones.
- **Reassure them**. Let them know you love them, these feelings won’t last forever, and that you can find support to help things feel better.
- **Don’t ignore worrying signs**, hoping they’ll go away. Trust your gut feeling – you know when something’s just not right.
- **Seek professional help** if you’re worried about your child’s mental health. Some young people will need professional and specialist help to feel better. They may benefit from a specific diagnosis or a treatment. Start by contacting your GP.



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Self Harm

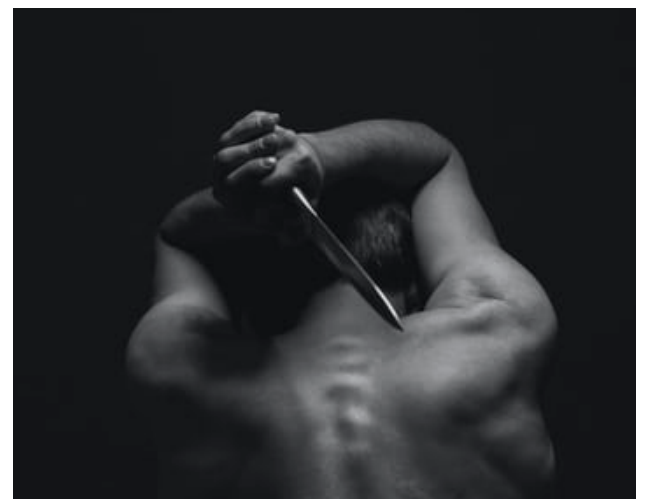
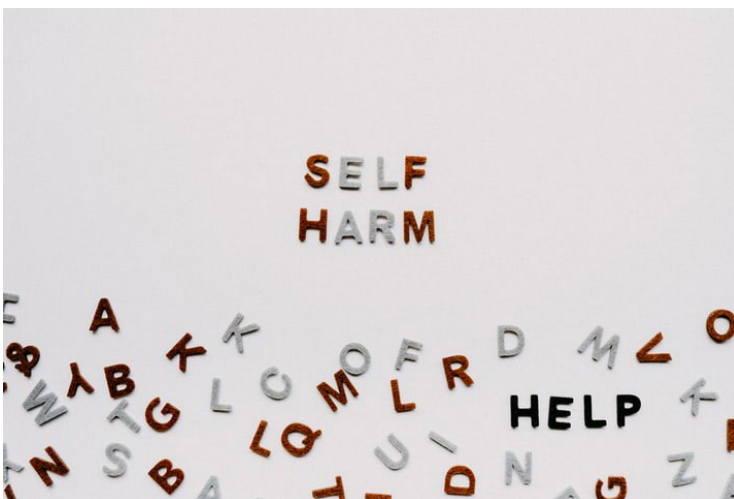
“Your worst enemy cannot harm you as much as your own unguarded thoughts.”

-Buddha-



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The idea that your child wants to hurt themselves on purpose is very difficult for many parents to understand. The impulse can be equally frightening for the children that do it. There is a myth that self harm is an attention seeking behaviour, but most young people go to great lengths to hide it from their loved ones.



Images Credit: unsplash.com

36%

of 16-25 year-olds in Britain have
self-harmed at some point in their lives....

According to a [survey](#) commissioned by [Alumina](#) (formerly Self Harm UK), [The Mix](#) and [YoungMinds](#).

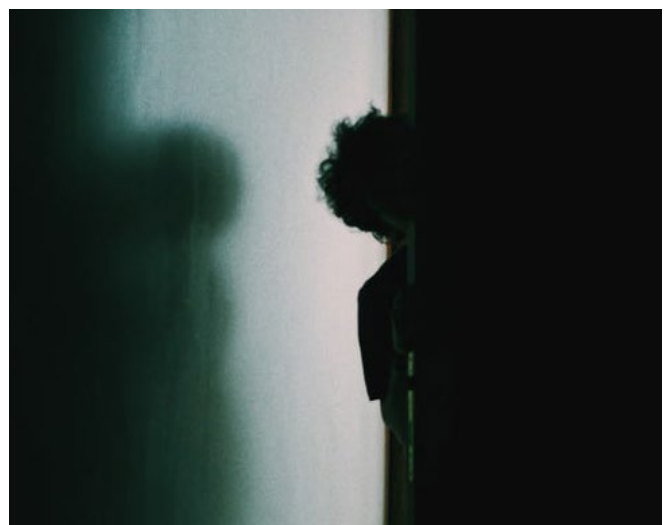
The survey defined self harm as “*when someone intentionally damages or injures their body*”. This can include scratching, cutting, burning, pinching or hitting, self-poisoning, misusing alcohol or drugs, self-starvation, binge eating and excessive exercise.

Young people turn to self harm when they are experiencing feelings that they can't process any other way. Sometimes it's the result of feeling [anxious](#), [depressed](#), or stressed, but it could also happen as a result of trauma such as abuse, [bullying](#), bereavement, or friend or family conflict. Self harm may bring temporary relief, but it does not get to the root of the emotions fueling it.

If you suspect (or know) that your child is self harming, try not to freak out or get angry - it will add fuel to their feelings of shame and guilt. Instead, stay as steady, calm, and non-judgmental as possible and listen with empathy to what's bothering them.

Possible signs of self harm:

- Unexplained cuts and bruises
- Wearing long sleeved clothes, especially in warm weather
- Keeping knives or razor blades (or these going missing in the home)
- Unexplained blood stains on clothes or towels
- Becoming more withdrawn and closed off
- Negative changes in their mood and behaviour



Images Credit: unsplash.com

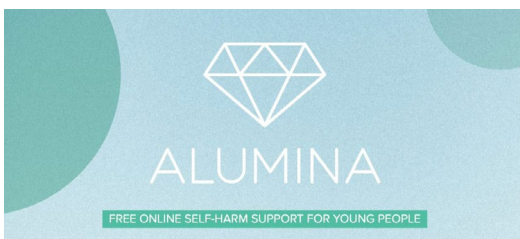
Remember:

- Don't try to have a conversation when you (or they) are upset.
- Listen and try not to judge or offer 'solutions' - it may make them even more secretive.
- If you don't know what to say, be honest about it. Being truthful about your own feelings may encourage them to do the same.
- If they won't talk to you, encourage them to talk to someone they feel comfortable with.
- Don't check their arms every five minutes or ask about it every day - give them space and time and accept that recovery is a process.
- Focus on safety: keeping cuts clean and bandaged, for example.



Image Credit:
unsplash.com

Many charities exist to support young people with their mental health including those who self harm. Young people can also seek specialty support from [Alumina](#) (formerly Self Harm UK) who offer a free 7 week online course for young people ages 14-19 struggling with self-harm.



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Suicide

“Even the darkest
night will end and
the sun will rise.”

-Victor Hugo-

Suicide is the ultimate form of self harm. Talking about it with your child can provoke strong feelings of panic or alarm, and throw you into 'rescue mode.' Though the impulse to act quickly is completely understandable, the distressed young person actually needs calm and understanding.



Image Credit: unsplash.com

If you are concerned that your child is having thoughts of suicide, what should you do?

- First, **be direct** - ask them if they are having thoughts of ending their life. Suicidal thoughts don't necessarily mean there is an imminent risk. Feelings of despair, frustration or failure can cause a young person to feel suicidal temporarily. They may cycle through such feelings and yet have no intention of acting on them.
- Second, **do not panic** if they are feeling suicidal - it may push them away and make them less likely to open up. Stay steady and use empathy to let them know that you have heard them and understand that they are struggling. This may be hard, so take your time, keep breathing, and acknowledge your own distress.
- Third, **seek professional support** - speak to your GP or access guidance from the many charities that exist to support suicidal ideation. (See the resources page in this booklet).

Here are some useful questions for taking about suicide:

- How long have you been feeling this way? (Is this a new feeling?)
- Are you feeling like this all the time or only sometimes?
- What is worrying you the most at the moment to make you feel this way?
- Have you made plans to end your life? (What? When? Where? What might stop you?)
- What would you like me to do now you have told me?
- If your child is reluctant or afraid to speak to you, encourage them to speak to someone else. The Samaritans hotline (116 123) is available 24/7 for both you and your child.



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Alcohol & Drug Use

“In youth we learn.
In age we
understand.”

-Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach-

Taking risks and learning about personal boundaries is a key factor in adolescence. For some this means experimenting with drugs and alcohol. The good news is, today's teenagers are less likely to take drugs, to smoke, or to drink alcohol than the generation before them (view statistics [here](#).) The bad news is, plenty of young people still do experiment with alcohol and drugs and there are risks for doing so.



Image Credit: unsplash.com

Being 'under the influence' can have serious effects on a young person's developing brain and body. It also exposes them to potentially risky situations as the effects of substance use lowers their inhibitions and impairs their ability to make sound judgements.

There are many [reasons](#) that Teenagers use drugs and alcohol, including what they learn from observing the adults in their life. (Remember, you are their number one role model!) They may engage in substance misuse as a temporary distraction from pressure or worries of life thinking it is a way to help them cope, or they may be influenced by peer pressure and what they see going on around them.



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If you are worried about your child, here are some tips for talking to them about alcohol or drugs:

- Sit down and have an honest conversation when you are both calm. (You can use a 'hook' such as something you've both watched on TV as a conversation starter.) Ensure it is a conversation and not a lecture!
- Listen as much as you talk.
- Try to talk about the dangers of substance misuse before they are likely to be interested in experimenting.
- Make sure your teenager knows they can come to you with any problems.
- Let them know substance misuse is never a solution to a problem and that there are always other ways to cope.
- If your child comes home under the influence, ensure they are safe and tell them you will talk about it the next day



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19

Eating Disorders

“I cannot stress this
enough - eating
disorders do not
have a look.”

-Nyla Booras-

Eating disorders are not about trying to lose a bit of weight - they are a complex mental health issue that can quickly take over one's life. Although they are most common amongst teenage girls, anyone can develop an eating disorder regardless of age or gender.



Image Credit: unsplash.com

People go to great lengths to disguise their unhealthy eating patterns, but if your child is obsessed with their appearance, weight, or body shape to the point where they control or restrict their food intake, or exercise fanatically - pay attention. Unhealthy behaviours such as these can cause all manner of long-term psychological and physical problems. They can even be fatal.

Common eating disorders:

Anorexia - Severe food restriction to complete starvation and/or 'purging' behaviours such as vomiting after eating, taking laxatives, or over-exercising. Anorexics have a distorted body image ([body dysmorphia](#)), believing they are fat when they are not.

Bulimia - Eating a lot of food in one sitting (bingeing) and then vomiting, taking laxatives or exercise excessively to get rid of the calories consumed (purging).

Binge Eating Disorder (BED) - Like bulimia (binge eating) but without the purging behaviours.



Images Credit: unsplash.com



25%

of dieters will progress to an eating disorder

Statistic quoted from [The Emily Program](#)

Most teens will [hide their eating disorder](#). There is an [extensive list](#) of signs and symptoms to be aware of - here are just a few to watch out for:

- Being preoccupied with weight, food, calories, fat grams, and dieting, or developing strange rituals around eating such as cutting food into tiny bites or excessive chewing.
- Dramatic weight loss
- Lying about how much or when they have eaten, or how much they weigh
- Eating a lot of food very fast
- Going to the bathroom a lot after eating
- Excessively or obsessively exercising
- Avoiding eating with others and withdrawing from friends or activities
- Wearing loose or baggy clothes to hide their weight loss
- Difficulty concentrating, dizziness, or sleep problems



Image Credit: unsplash.com

If you think your child has an eating disorder, talk to them and take them seriously, even if you don't understand why. (Chances are, they don't either.) Seeking professional help is essential - talk to your doctor. In the meantime, stop mentioning diet, body shape or weight - either yours, theirs, or other's - and don't talk about food.

[Beat Eating Disorders](#) is a UK charity with lots of practical guidance (including a useful helpline and online support), and the Priory group have a handy [digital guide](#) for parents/carers.



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Psychotic Disorders

“We need, ultimately, to be able to view mental health with the same clear-headedness we show when talking about physical health.”

-Matt Haig-

As scary as the word 'psychotic' is, in this context it refers to *"a group of serious illnesses that affect the mind... and make it hard for someone to think clearly, make good judgments, respond emotionally, communicate effectively, understand reality, and behave appropriately."* ([WebMD.com](https://www.webmd.com/mental/psychosis))



Image Credit: unsplash.com

Psychosis isn't a condition in itself – it's triggered by other conditions such as:

Schizophrenia – a condition that causes a range of psychological symptoms, including hallucinations and delusions

Bipolar Disorder – a mental health condition that affects mood; a person with bipolar disorder can have episodes of depression (lows) and mania (highs)

Severe depression – some people may have symptoms of psychosis when they're very depressed

Psychosis can also be triggered by traumatic experiences, stress, giving birth, or physical conditions such as Parkinson's disease (in adults), a brain tumour, or as a result of drug or alcohol misuse. People with psychotic disorders have trouble staying in touch with reality and often are unable to handle daily life. Less than 1% of the population will be affected by psychotic disorders, and they usually start in late adolescence or early adulthood. (They very rarely develop before the age of 10.)



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Early Intervention in Psychosis (EIP) teams operate across the UK and are instrumental in managing this illness. These teams provide day-to-day support and [treatment](#) to both the family and the affected young person for up to three years after their first episode of psychosis. In some areas you can make a direct referral to your local EIP team; in others you must go via your GP.



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Neurodiversity and Mental Health

“The advantage is that my brain sees and puts information in my head differently, more interestingly than if I saw like everyone else.”

-Whoopi Goldberg-

Neurodiversity is a term that refers to the natural differences between people in the way their brains are 'wired'. Between 30% and 40% of the population are thought to be neurodiverse; The remaining majority are neurotypical.



Image Credit: unsplash.com

Statistics for people in the UK:

Up to 1%

have Tourette's syndrome

Up to 10%

have dyslexia

Up to 3%

of the population have generalised intellectual disability

Up to 1%

have an autistic spectrum condition

Up to 6%

have dyscalculia

Up to 8%

have ADHD

Up to 8%

have dyspraxia

Statistics from: [ADHD Aware, Neurodiversity and other conditions](#)



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Being neurodiverse is not a mental health condition! However, there seems to be a [link](#) between neurodiversity and mental health, which is most-likely caused by societal factors. For example, it can be stressful to try and 'fit in' to a world that seems to be at odds with the way some young people filter it. Also, being sensitive to stimuli like loud working environments, difficulty in reading other people, and so forth, can cause anxiety.



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A Word About Bereavement

“Bereavement is a
universal and integral
part of our experience
of love.”

- C.S. Lewis-

Death and birth may be the inevitable bookends on our experience of life, but losing someone or something (a job, a relationship, a pet, a home) we love is tough. It is normal to experience a range of emotions when we are bereaved.

The seven stages of grief are often described as:

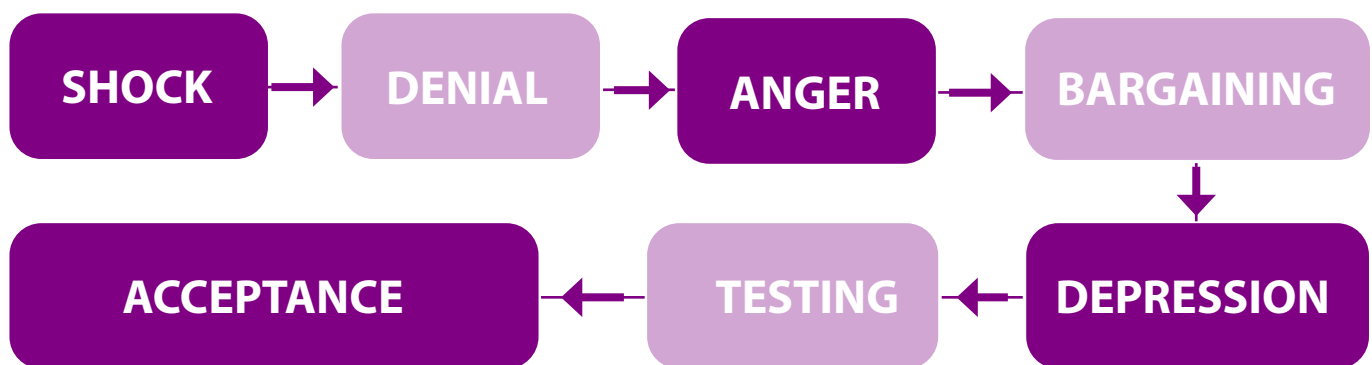


Image Credit: unsplash.com



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Image Credit: unsplash.com

You may have lost loved ones to the pandemic. Many students are also grieving the loss of exams - something anticipated as a right of passage - or just being in school. It's appropriate for them to feel upset about loss of exams, routines, access to friends, and perhaps a different future than they hoped for. Talk to them and allow them the opportunity to express their grief or anger or whatever they are feeling.

Bereavement is sometimes equated with the ocean - it arrives as waves, some that just lap at the shore and remind us of our loss, and some that crash and knock us back for a time. It is an unpredictable process. If you feel that you are stuck and can't move forward after a loss, it is recommended that you talk to someone. Many organisations exist just to help with grieving. See the list of resources at the end of this booklet.

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Managing Long Covid

“Uncertainty is the
most stressful
feeling.”

- Sonya Teclai-

People learning to deal with a long-term illness face many challenges. The uncertainty of what might lie ahead can be stressful, while the impact of an illness on family, friends, careers, future plans and dreams can leave you frustrated and despondent.

Long Covid is a term to describe the effects of Covid-19 that continue for weeks or months beyond the initial illness. The health watchdog NICE defines long Covid as symptoms lasting for more than 12 weeks.

NICE

National Institute for
Health and Care Excellence

Symptoms may include:

- Fatigue
- Breathlessness
- Anxiety and depression
- Palpitations
- Chest pains
- Joint or muscle pain
- Not being able to think straight or focus ('brain fog')



Image Credit: unsplash.com

From a mental health perspective, adjusting to life with an uncertain future takes courage. Facing your fears is much braver than avoiding them, so familiarize yourself with your symptoms and possible treatments or lifestyle changes that could help. Accept that adjustments to the way you live your life may be inevitable.

If you are struggling with Long Covid or any other long-term illness, try not to "personalise" it by saying, "my diabetes" or "my heart disease". Don't let the state of your health define you.

Here are some tips for tending your mental health with any long-term illness:

- Be prepared that some days will be worse than others so that you don't get knocked back when one arrives.
- Reach out to family and friends - supportive relationships make us feel good, but they can't help if they don't know you need it.
- Stick to a daily routine as much as possible - it can enhance your mood and give you a sense of stability.
- Keep active and move your body as much as you can. 'Happy hormones' known as endorphins are released when you exercise and improve your mood.



Image Credit: unsplash.com

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What Makes a 'Good Enough' Parent?

“Strive to be a ‘good enough’ parent, not a great one. It can make everyone in the family relax and paradoxically make life richer.”

- Wendy Mogel-

There is much advice about how to be a good parent. You may feel swamped with expectations both from yourself and others. Luckily, parenting is a messy, complicated undertaking that no one gets completely right. And in fact, it's okay to just be 'good enough.'



Image Credit: unsplash.com

British paediatrician and parent-infant therapist [D.W. Winnicott](#) coined the phrase 'good enough parent' back in 1953. He recognised that perfection was not only unhelpful, but undesirable. The things we get wrong as parents (and humans) are often the things we learn the most from. Acknowledging this lets yourself off the hook and also protects your kids from unrealistic ideals of perfectionism which are not healthy for you or them. (This [video](#) explains it well.)

To raise resilient, healthy children, they need to feel **competent**, **confident**, **connected**, develop **character**, feel that they **contribute** and can **cope** with life, and have **control** over their **choices**.

Apart from the basics of care (safety, nourishment, routine, love, etc.), here are some tips for being a 'good enough' parent:

- Provide opportunities for your child to be heard, acknowledged, and accepted.
- Acknowledge feelings and allow expression of emotions, even the uncomfortable ones. (This will strengthen your relationship and they will be more likely to come to you when they are struggling.)
- Help your children to understand their reactions and feelings by talking with them when they are calm, particularly about fears, anxieties, and feelings of guilt, frustration, and anger.
- Be patient, and apologise when you are not. A 'good enough' parent will admit when they're wrong, and take the blame when they mess up, make mistakes, or lose their temper.
- Provide empathy, reassurance and comfort, rather than trying to solve their problems.
- Allow questions to be asked, and answer them openly and honestly.



Image Credit: unsplash.com

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Motivating Your Child

“There is nothing in
a caterpillar that tells
you it’s going to be a
butterfly.”

-Buckminster Fuller-

Keeping your child motivated can be difficult at the best of times, and near impossible during a pandemic. You may cycle between ‘the carrot and the stick’ without much luck either way. But basic psychology tells us that when there’s a sufficient ‘why’, we can find the ‘how’.



Image Credit: unsplash.com

With teenagers in particular, if they do not understand what a task has to do with them (their wellbeing, their future, etc.) they will struggle to carry it out.

Teenagers want to feel significant and to demonstrate to themselves, to their families, and the world that they matter and are capable of making a difference. When tasks are linked to supporting these feelings they will naturally feel more motivated.

Teenager Expert [Chris Hudson](#) has identified 7 key factors for motivating your child:

1) What's in it for me? If your child understands the value to them of a task, you will have little problem motivating them to do it. Getting schoolwork done is necessary for a teen who wants to get into university, or be considered for their dream job one day; Finding a part time job is needed if they want to have money.

2) Let them have a say. If your teenager feels like all they are being asked to do is to fit into your agenda, your timetable, your way of doing things, they are not going to be terribly motivated. Developmentally, teenagers are seeking to establish themselves as their own person, independent from their parents. Give them a say in what and how things are done and they will be much more motivated.

3) Let them learn from failure. When parents constantly rescue their kids from failing they undermine their ability to grow up. No parent wants to see their kids fail, but it is through failure that we grow and learn to improve. Preventing your child from experiencing failure robs a task of its significance, and kills their motivation to do better next time.

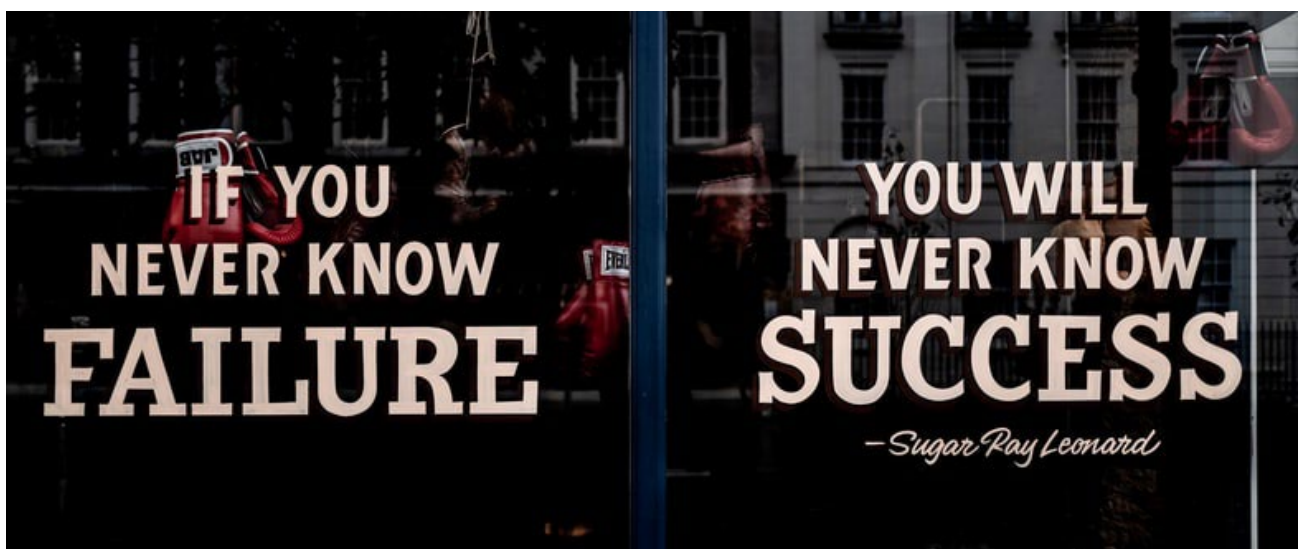


Image Credit: unsplash.com

4) Help them to remember. Sometimes motivation is not the reason that teenagers don't do things - they simply forget. Teenagers' brains are still developing making them more prone to distraction and forgetfulness. They may need help to remember and to get organized. Constant nagging is not the solution. Instead agree non-verbal reminders (texting, post-it notes, etc,) teach them how to be organised, and help them develop their own methods of remembering.

5) Make it achievable. Sometimes teens simply don't know where to start on a task. If you think this might be the case, ask them! Does the task seem too big? Do they know where to start? Do they feel like they will never be able to do it so can't be bothered starting? Maybe they feel scared about failing? Whatever the reason, helping them think through a process for getting the job done by breaking it into smaller parts could be just the thing they need.

6) Provide incentives. By offering rewards for effort, improvement, or participation, you reinforce in your teenager the values of trying and perseverance, rather than rewarding the act of giving up or resigning. Knowing what type of incentive your teen will respond best to (encouraging words, gifts, quality time, physical affection, etc.,) will increase their motivation and responsiveness.

7) Make it fun. Fun is the key ingredient to getting teens motivated and cooperative. Figure out what they enjoy (remember, what you enjoy may not be what they enjoy), show an interest, and value whatever it is that they consider interesting and fun. Teenager's often respond to competition. No matter how menial the task, any job can be transformed if there is a competitive aspect, whether it's against others or just their own efforts.

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Getting Support

“Even if you’re on the right track, you’ll get run over if you just sit there.”

-Will Rogers-

Good outcomes for mental health and emotional wellbeing rely on good support. Contact your GP, your child's school, or some of the many helplines and organisations listed below.







Helplines & Support Organisations

	Anxiety UK (anxiety advice)	Text: 07537 416 905 Helpline: 03444 775 774
	Beat (eating disorders)	Helpline: 0808 801 0677 Studentline: 0808 801 0811 Youthline: 0808 801 0711
	CALM - Campaign Against Living Miserably (male suicide prevention ages 15+)	0800 58 58 58
	Childline (advice & support for any issue) childline.org.uk	0800 1111
	Cruse (bereavement care & support)	0808 808 1677
	Drinkline (advice about your own or another's drinking)	0300 123 1110
	FRANK (info & advice about drugs)	0300 123 66 00



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Helplines & Support Organisations

	<u>Kooth</u> (online mental well-being support)	www.kooth.com
	<u>Mermaids</u> (Supporting trans-gender, non-binary, and gender diverse young people since 1995; helpline 9-9, M-F)	
	<u>The Mix</u> (Essential support for anyone aged 12-25.)	0808 808 4994 or text THEMIX to 85258
	<u>Muslim Youth Helpline</u> (MYH is a registered charity which provides pioneering faith and culturally sensitive services to Muslim youth in the UK.)	0808 808 2008
	<u>National Association for Children of Alcoholics</u> Providing information, advice and support for everyone affected by a parent's drinking	0800 358 3456
	<u>NSPCC</u> - National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (abuse, neglect, domestic violence)	0800 1111



Helplines & Support Organisations

 PAPYRUS PREVENTION OF YOUNG SUICIDE	<u>Papyrus</u> (youth suicide prevention)	0800 068 4141
 RAPE CRISIS England & Wales	<u>Rape Crisis</u> (Confidential support for women and girls who have experienced sexual violence.)	0808 802 9999
 Refuge	<u>Refuge</u> (free 24-hour national domestic abuse helpline)	0808 2000 247
 relate the relationship people	<u>Relate</u> (UKs largest provider of relationship support; many resources available on their website)	
 SAMARITANS	<u>Samaritans</u> (distress, despair, suicide prevention)	116 123
 shout for support in a crisis	<u>Shout</u> (crisis support)	Text 'SHOUT' to 85258
 Switchboard LGBT+ helpline	<u>Switchboard</u> (LGBT+ helpline)	0300 330 0630
 VICTIM SUPPORT	<u>Victim Support</u> (crime & traumatic events support)	0808 16 89 111

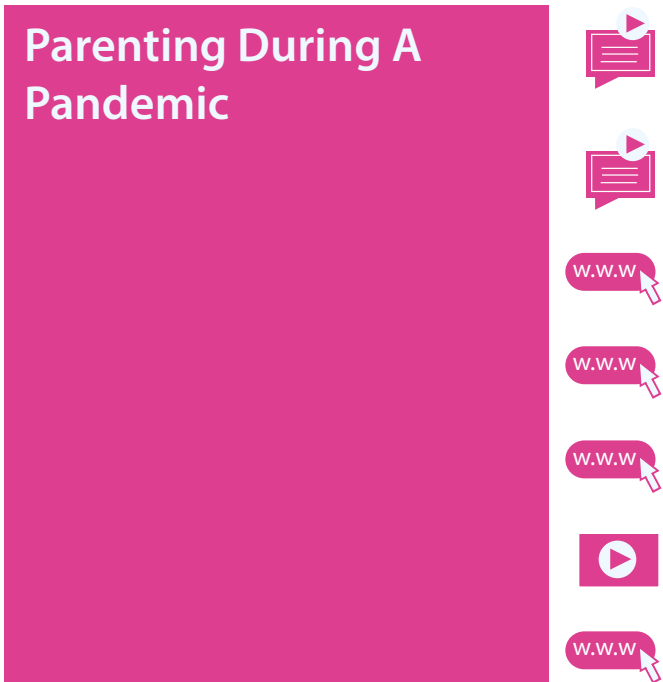









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Helplines & Support Organisations

	<u>Winston's Wish</u> (children's bereavement support)	08088 020 021
	<u>YoungMinds</u> (info & advice about mental health)	Text 'YM' to 85258

Resources

		<u>Parenting Teens in Times of Uncertainty</u> (webinar - 54:00)
		<u>Supporting your Teenager with Lockdown</u> (webinar - 30:00)
		<u>Staying well during the pandemic</u> (website link)
		<u>Explaining coronavirus</u> (website link)
		<u>Returning to school or college</u> (website link)
		<u>Coronavirus Dealing with anxiety & mental health during a pandemic</u> (video)
		<u>Covid-19 Resource Hub</u> (website link)



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Resources

Parenting Misc		RelateForParents (YouTube channel)
		ParentChannelTV (YouTube channel)
		How to spot the signs of mental illness (video)
		The Impact of Social Media on Children, Adolescents & Families (article)
		Being With and 'Shark Music' (video)
		Good Enough is Good Enough (video)
Parental Well-being		Adult talking therapies: Croydon, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark (website)
		Adult Talking therapies: Wandsworth (website)
		What is good mental health? (video)
Alcohol & Drugs		Parents Guide to Drugs & Alcohol (article)
		Talk to frank: Honest Information About Drugs (website)
		Drugs Webinar Daniel Spargo-Mabbs Foundation (webinar)
		Dealing with Addictions (video)
		Drinkaware Home Drinkaware (website)
		Understand Why Children Drink Alcohol (article)



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Anxiety		Supporting your Teenager with Anxiety (video)
		How to Avoid Passing Your Anxiety to Your Kids (article)
		Managing Anxiety in your Teens (video)
		How to Manage Rumination and Overthinking (video)
		Stress, Worry and Anxiety (website link)
		Superpowered: Transform Anxiety Into Courage, Confidence, and Resilience (book)
		NHS Guide: Stress, Anxiety & Depression (website link)
		Anxiety - a Short Film (video)
Bereavement & Loss		Phobias - What are you so scared of? (article)
		Bereavement and Loss (website link)
		5 Things About Grief No One Really Tells You (video)
		How do you support a grieving friend? (video)
Depression		How Grief Affect Your Brain (video)
		5 Signs of Teenage Depression (video)
		I'm Fine - Teenage Depression (video)



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Eating Disorders		Dealing with and Eating Disorder (video)
		Eating and Body Dysmorphic Disorders: Crash Course Psychology (video)
		What is an Eating Disorder and When to Worry (article)
Dealing with Long Term Illness		Long-term effects of coronavirus (long COVID) - NHS (www.nhs.uk)
Mental Health Stigma		There's no shame in taking care of your mental health - Sangu Delle (video)
		We all Have Mental Health (video)
Motivation		6 Ways to Motivate Your Kids (article)
		The 7 Secrets of Motivating Teenagers (article)
Neurodiversity		ADDitude Magazine (website)
		Neurodiversity is a Super Power (video)
		Amazing Things Happen - National Autism Society (video)
Nutrition & Mental Health		How does nutrition impact our mental health? (podcast)
		Food for Thought: Does What My Children Eat Affect Their Mental Health? (article)



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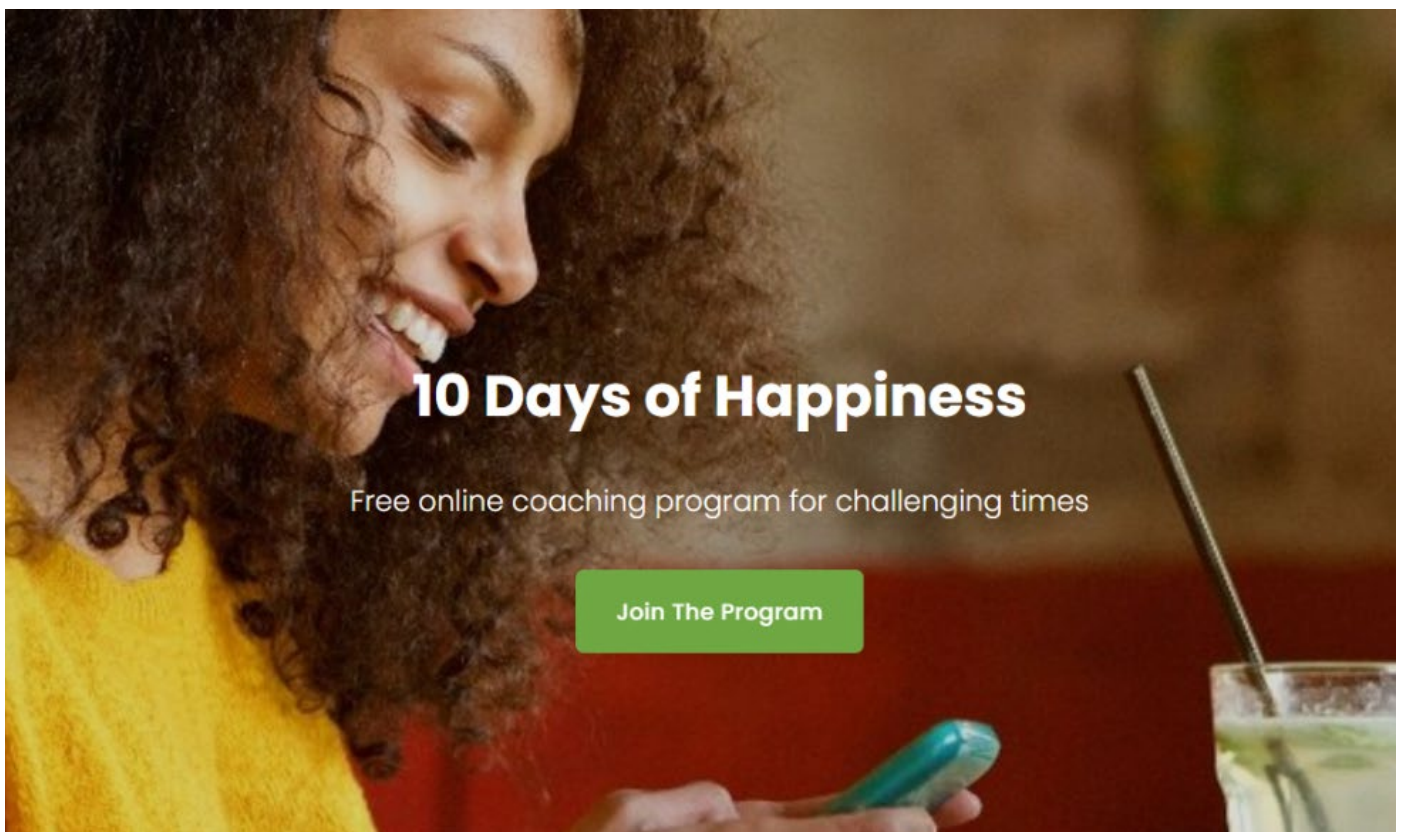
Resources

Self Harm		Turning to Self Harm (video)
		Seeing the Scars - Teenage Self Harm (video)
		How Parents Should Talk to Their Kids About Self-Harm (video)
Sleep		Improving your Child's Sleep Part 1 (7 mins), Part 2 (12 mins), Part 3 (12 mins) (Webinars from the SW London & St George's Trust)
		Improving your Teenager's Sleep (webinar - 11 mins)
		Relaxation Strategies for a Better Night's Sleep (video)
		Getting a Good Night's Sleep: Top Tips for Teens (video)
		Sleep: Top Tips for Teens - Relaxation (video)
Teenage Brain		Evolutionary Advantage of the Teenage Brain (video)
		Why do we lose control of our emotions? (video)
		Teenage Brain Development - Dr Andrew Curran (video)
Trauma		Trauma and Addiction: Crash Course Psychology (video)
		How Childhood Trauma Affects Health Across a Lifetime (video)



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Action For Happiness



<https://10daysofhappiness.org/>



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The Conversation (<https://theconversation.com/uk>)
Do It (<https://do-it.org/>)
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The Emily Program (<https://www.emilyprogram.com/>)
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The Lily Project (<https://www.thelilyproject.com/>)
MOB Kitchen (<https://www.mobkitchen.co.uk>)
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Mind (<https://www.mind.org.uk/>)
The Mix (<https://www.themix.org.uk/>)
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Very Well Mind (<https://www.verywellmind.com/>)

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WebMD (<https://www.webmd.com/>)

Youngminds (<https://youngminds.org.uk/>)

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"A diamond is merely a lump
of coal that did well under
pressure."

-Unknown-



