



headspace

Family / Friends / Carers

Welcome & Information Pack

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headspace

National Youth Mental Health Foundation

Welcome Pack – for Family and Friends



headspace Mt Druitt
55 North Parade
Mount Druitt
NSW 2770

8881-2500

Opening hours

Monday - Friday: 9.00AM - 5.00PM
Saturday and Sunday: CLOSED

After hours appointments available
upon request

[headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)

headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health.

headspace acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia and we pay our respects to their Elders past and present who we share this great country with.



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Welcome to headspace

headspace is a family and friends inclusive service.

headspace believes that family and friends play an important role in a young person's journey to better wellbeing.

We understand that there are many different types of family and friends that are important in a young person's life. These include:

All types of families:

nuclear, extended, blended, single-parent, heterosexual, same-sex couples

Non-parental care-givers:

partners, foster parents, grandparents, god-parents, adoptive parents, other family members

Significant others:

friends, teachers, mentors, kinship relations, spiritual care leaders

We know from research that involving family and friends in a young person's care can lead to better health outcomes for young people¹. Wherever possible, we advocate for and provide meaningful opportunities for family and friends to directly participate in our services.

How you can be involved in supporting your young person will depend on many things – including the young person's age, life experience and their feelings about family involvement.

All family and friends involvement at headspace is respectful of the privacy and confidentiality of young people.

This pack will introduce you to our service and where you can find further information and support for you and your young person.

¹ Hopkins, L., Lee, S., McGrane, T., & Barbara-May, R. (2016). Single session family therapy in youth mental health: Can it help? *Australasian Psychiatry*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1177/1039856216658807

What is headspace?

headspace is the National Youth Mental Health Foundation. We deliver services and support to young people aged 12–25 and their family and friends in four key areas:



mental health



physical and sexual health



work, school and study

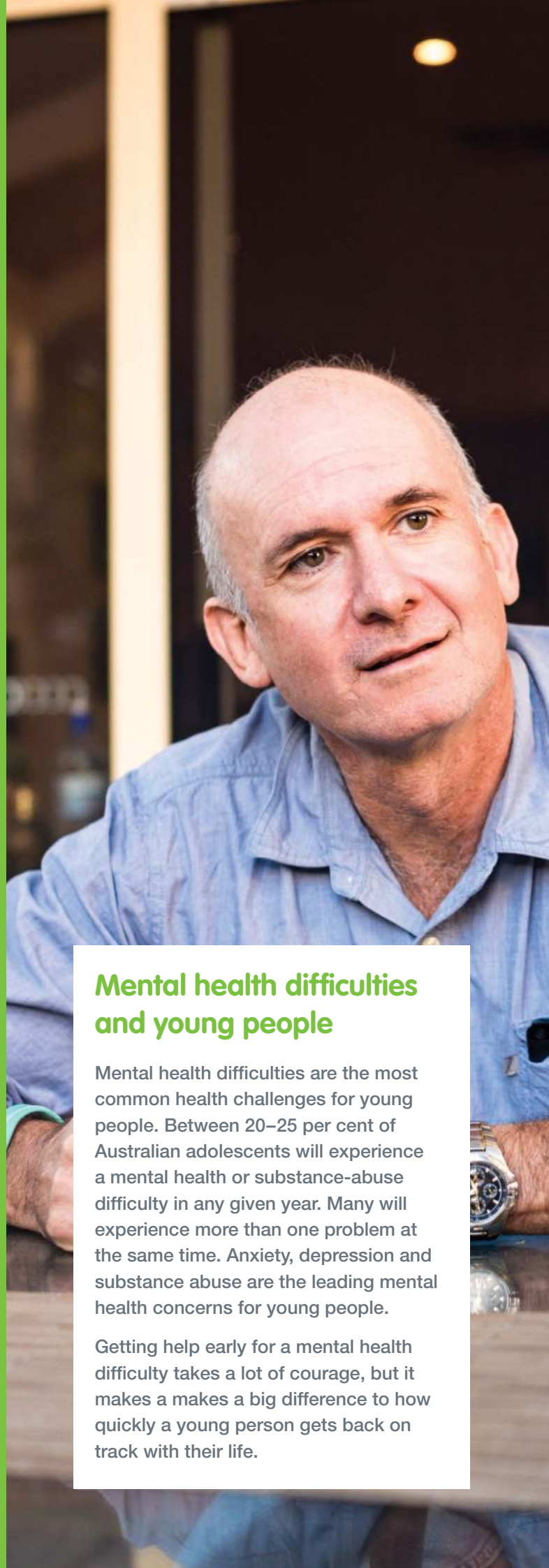


alcohol and other drugs

headspace is a good place to seek help if a young person:

- needs help with any type of health issue
- is having difficulty with something in their life
- feels sad, anxious, worried or worthless
- is concerned about their use of alcohol and/or drugs
- is worried about a friend or family member
- needs advice about work or study
- needs to discuss relationships, sexuality or their sexual health.

We keep young people at the heart of our services



Mental health difficulties and young people

Mental health difficulties are the most common health challenges for young people. Between 20–25 per cent of Australian adolescents will experience a mental health or substance-abuse difficulty in any given year. Many will experience more than one problem at the same time. Anxiety, depression and substance abuse are the leading mental health concerns for young people.

Getting help early for a mental health difficulty takes a lot of courage, but it makes a big difference to how quickly a young person gets back on track with their life.



Common myths and facts about mental health difficulties

Myth: There is no hope for people with a mental illness.

Fact: There are many supports, treatments and community services available. People with a mental illness can lead active, productive and healthy lives.

Myth: Mental health difficulties are caused by genetics.

Fact: Mental health difficulties occur due to a complex combination of factors. These factors can be biological (due to a family history of mental health difficulties), psychological (e.g., trauma, loss, neglect) and/or environmental (e.g., stress, money problems, social pressure).

Myth: Non-qualified people cannot help people with a mental health difficulty.

Fact: Friends and family can offer important help and support. When family and friends speak and act positively towards a young person with a mental health difficulty, they create an environment that builds on a young person's strengths and promotes understanding and respect.



How headspace can help

Information and services for young people can be accessed through:



1 The headspace website

Our website includes information about mental and physical health, work and study, drugs and alcohol, how to get help and how family and friends can support a young person going through a tough time.

To access the **headspace** website visit headspace.org.au.



2 eheadspace

eheadspace is our national online and telephone support service. It is staffed by experienced youth and mental health professionals.

Young people in contact with **eheadspace** can access a range of information and support as well as short-term treatment, where appropriate.

To access **eheadspace** visit eheadspace.org.au or phone 1800 650 890. Web chat, telephone and email support is available to young people, as well as their families and friends, from 9am to 1am AEST, 365 days of the year. Email access to eheadspace is available 24 hours a day.



3 headspace centres

headspace centres provide young people with access to a range of health workers who have specific expertise in working with young people – including doctors, psychologists, social workers, alcohol and drug workers, counsellors, vocational workers, occupational therapists and youth workers.

Young people can make an appointment at a centre in person or by phone or email. Family or friends can also make an appointment on behalf of a young person, if the young person consents to the appointment.

To find out about information and support available to family and friends of young people with a mental health difficulty, see the Further information and support section.



Please note

headspace provides time-limited services for mild to moderate difficulties. It is not an emergency service.

If you or your young person need immediate support or medical assistance contact:

- Emergency Services 000
- Lifeline 13 11 14
- Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800

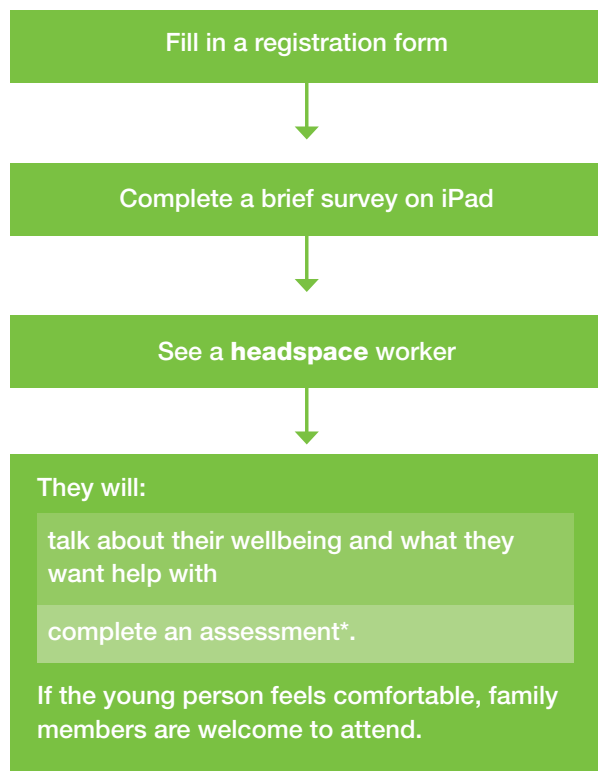
If your young person is experiencing more severe difficulties, they may be eligible for specialist clinical mental health services. For contact details, see the Further information and support section.



What happens when a young person visits headspace?

At the first visit

The first time a young person visits **headspace**, they will:



After the first visit

If a young person chooses to continue at **headspace**, they will:

Work on goals with their **headspace** worker, such as:

- brief intervention and problem solving with a qualified counsellor
- early intervention and supportive counselling with one of our clinical team
- access to a doctor and/or mental health nurse for physical or mental health difficulties
- study or vocational assistance with a work and study specialist
- alcohol and drug assistance from an alcohol and drug counsellor
- referral to other agencies best suited to the young person and/or family's needs. If the young person needs a referral from a doctor to access a particular service, **headspace** can arrange this.

* If you have questions about our assessment, visit headspace.org.au/health-professionals/headspace-psychosocial-assessment-interview



How long will an appointment take?

Appointments usually last 50 minutes to an hour. Sessions with a doctor might be shorter.



How much will an appointment cost?



Services at a **headspace** centre are either free or have a low cost. This can be confirmed when an appointment is made.

Can I access headspace on behalf of my young person?

Whether your young person is ready to access our services or not, we encourage you to make contact with us and discuss ways we might engage your young person or how you can be supported to care for your young person.



If you would like to talk to a **headspace** worker, please call us. You may be booked into an appointment or offered support over the phone.

If your young person is engaged or is willing to engage with **headspace**, ask us about the support and involvement we offer to family and friends.

Before making contact with us, it is a good idea to talk with your young person about it first.



Consent and confidentiality

Consent

headspace is a voluntary service. Health workers can only provide treatment to young people who give consent. This is something we will ask a young person when they attend.

If the young person is under 18: A parent or legal guardian is the appropriate person to give consent to access our service. In some cases these young people can consent to treatment without parental permission.

If the young person is over 18: We will work with the young person to involve their family and friends in ways that they are comfortable with, and that are likely to be beneficial to the young person's wellbeing.

If you would like a copy of our Consent Policy, please speak to a **headspace** worker.

Confidentiality

When a young person talks to a **headspace** worker, nothing they say can be passed on to anyone else without their permission unless the young person:

- 1) is at risk of harming themselves or someone else
- 2) is at risk of being harmed by others
- 3) has committed a serious crime.

In these cases we will provide only necessary information to appropriate services or support people.

If you have any questions about confidentiality, please speak to a **headspace** worker.

How can I support my young person while they are waiting for an appointment?

We understand that wait times for appointments may vary. While your young person is waiting for an appointment, here are some ways you can support them:

keep communication open, show empathy and don't rush into judgements

be available without being intrusive or 'pushy'

spend time with them

take an interest in their activities, and encourage them to talk about what's happening in their life

take their feelings seriously

encourage and support friendships

encourage activities that promote mental health, such as exercise, good eating, regular sleep and doing things they enjoy

give positive feedback

let them know that you love them. They may not always admit it but this is likely to be very important to them.

For further information, visit headspace.org.au/friends-and-family/category/parent-information#categories.

Self-care

At **headspace** we encourage self-care. Worrying about someone you care about is tough, so you must remember to be kind to yourself. Maintaining your own health and wellbeing enables you to best take care of the person you are supporting.

Here are a few ideas:

- Eat well and drink plenty of water
- Get a good night's sleep
- Unplug your phone, television or computer
- Get active
- Engage in a hobby
- Spend time with friends
- Practise gratitude – notice those things in life you are grateful for
- Check in with your emotions in a space where you feel comfortable.



Families with English as a second language

headspace services are provided in English. In some cases interpreters can be arranged in advance to support the young person or their family and friends to communicate with a **headspace** worker during a session.

For more information on mental health in a language other than English, please speak to a **headspace** worker or visit Mental Health in Multicultural Australia at mhima.org.au.

How can I contribute to headspace?

Family and friends' involvement in the delivery of our services is important to us. If you would like to provide input into how we engage with family and friends as a service, please speak to a **headspace** worker.



Further information and support

In tough times it is important to talk to trusted support people such as a close family member, school teacher, doctor or chaplain.

Family and Carers Mental Health, offers support to anyone caring for a young person with mental health issues. For more details contact: 8599 4880 or via e-mail: fcmhinfobm@parramattamission.org.au

In addition there are Family and Carer counselling services provided by Interrelate. To make an appointment contact: 1300 473 528 or via web site: interrelate.org.au



If you need further professional support, you may be eligible for a Mental Health Care Plan (MHCP). A MHCP allows a person to access rebates for mental health care services. To work out whether a MHCP is appropriate for you, see your local doctor.

The following agencies also provide information and support to family and friends caring for young people.

National agencies

beyondblue

beyondblue.org.au

1300 224 636

- Information about supporting someone with depression or anxiety
- Online chat & 24/7 phone support

Black Dog Institute

blackdoginstitute.org.au

- Information about supporting someone with depression or bipolar disorder

Carers Australia

carersaustralia.com.au

- Carer counselling, advice, advocacy, education and training

QLife

qlife.org.au

1800 184 527

- Information about supporting people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, intersex, queer or questioning (LGBTIQ)
- Online chat & phone support

Reachout

reachout.com

- Information about supporting young people with mental health difficulties

Sane Australia

sane.org

1800 18 (SANE) 7263

- Information about helping someone experiencing a mental health crisis
- Online chat & phone support

State agencies

Community Mental Health Services:

- Child and Youth Mental Health Service (CYMHS)
 - Blacktown Early Access Team (BEAT)
 - Prevention Early Intervention & Recovery Services (PEIRS)
- 1800 011 511

Mental Health Line

1800 011 511

Kids Helpline

1800 551 800

Carers Australia

1800 242 636

Suicide Callback Service

1300 659 467

Mensline

1300 789 878

Family and Carers - List of Services

Calls to 1800 numbers are free. A standard call cost to all other numbers will apply.



Emergency Services

Police, Ambulance, Fire 000

Poisons Information 13 11 26

Crisis Support

Lifeline 13 11 14 (24 hours, 7 days a week)

Lifeline Online Crisis Support Chat www.lifeline.org.au/crisischat
(7pm-midnight 7 days a week)

Lifeline Get Help Website www.lifeline.org.au/gethelp

Lifeline Service Finder lifeline.serviceseeker.com.au

Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Helpline 1800 RESPECT or 1800 737 732

Adults Surviving Child Abuse 1300 657 380

Suicide Call Back Service* 1300 659 467

*For anyone with thoughts of suicide, supporting someone who is suicidal, has lost someone to suicide or is a health professional.

24hr Mental Health Line 1800 011 511

Beyond Blue 1300 224 636

Grief Line Helpline 1300 845 745

Housing and Food

Wentworth Community Housing (Penrith, Hawkesbury and Blue Mountains areas) 47 77 8000

Mission Australia Housing 1800 269 672

Mama Lana's Community Foundation Penrith 0407 909 447

Crisis Accommodation Link2Home 1800 152 152

Food Solutions Christ Mission Possible Kingswood 1300HELP2U or 02 4704 8809

Services Contact Information

Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service NSW 1800 938 227

After Hours GP Helpline 1800 022 222

(A nurse will answer your enquiry first and decide if you need to be transferred through to talk to a GP)
(Mon – Fri 11pm – 7.30am, Saturday from 6pm. All day Sunday and public holidays)

Carers NSW 1800 242 636 (Mon – Fri 9am-5pm)

Emergency Respite Call 1800 052 222

Q Life 1800 184 527

Legal Aid 1300 888 529

Centrelink Customer Service 132 307

NDIS 1800 800 110

Online Crisis and Online Support

Lifeline	www.lifeline.org.au
SANE Australia	www.sane.org
Beyond Blue	www.beyondblue.org.au
Youth Beyond Blue	youth.beyondblue.com
ReachOut	www.reachout.com.au
eheadspace Online Chat service	www.headspace.org.au/eheadspace (Open 9am – 1am)
Mensline	www.mensline.org.au
Black Dog Institute	www.blackdoginstitute.org.au
QLife	qlife.org.au/support
Drug and Alcohol Counselling online	counsellingonline.org.au
e-Mental Health Services - Directory	www.emhprac.org.au/services

Counselling

Wash House Mount Druitt - Services for Women	02 9677 1962
Blacktown Women & Girls Health Centre	02 9831 2070
Kids Helpline	1800 551 800
Mensline	1300 789 978
Relationships Australia	1300 364 277
LikeMind	Penrith 02 8880 8111 Seven Hills 02 8806 3800
Interrelate Bella Vista	1300 473 528

headspace Offices

headspace Mount Druitt	02 8881 2500
headspace Penrith	02 4720 8800
headspace Parramatta	1300 737 616
eheadspace	1800 650 890

Financial Counselling

The Salvation Army Money Care Parramatta	02 9633 5011
MURU MITIGAR Penrith	1300 MURU HUB



CONSORTIUM PARTNERS

At **headspace** Mount Druitt we have consortium partners which are here to help provide you with extra support with certain topics and also provide a broader range of services. Consortium partners are external services that team up with **headspace** to make those services accessible to you.

EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION SUPPORT

A b i l i t y O p t i o n s

Are you looking for a job or want to start studying? Ability options can help support young people in finding a job and achieving your career goals. They will work with you to find the best solution.



DRUG AND ALCOHOL SUPPORT

S a l v a t i o n A r m y
h e a d F Y R S T

Salvation Army headFYRST can help provide young people with support around any questions you or a friend may have around drugs or alcohol.

HOUSING AND CASE MANAGEMENT

P a r r a m a t t a M i s s i o n
F o u n d a t i o n s

Foundations is a service that provides semi-supported transitional accommodation support to those aged 16-24 years old. Foundations can help young people develop living skills and can support you with things such as obtaining Centrelink payments.



FAMILY SUPPORT

P a r r a m a t t a M i s s i o n
F a m i l y a n d C a r e r s
M e n t a l h e a l t h

Family and Carers Mental Health will provide support to parents or carers by providing them with knowledge about mental health. They will also help link them into services who can help support their needs.

FAMILY SUPPORT

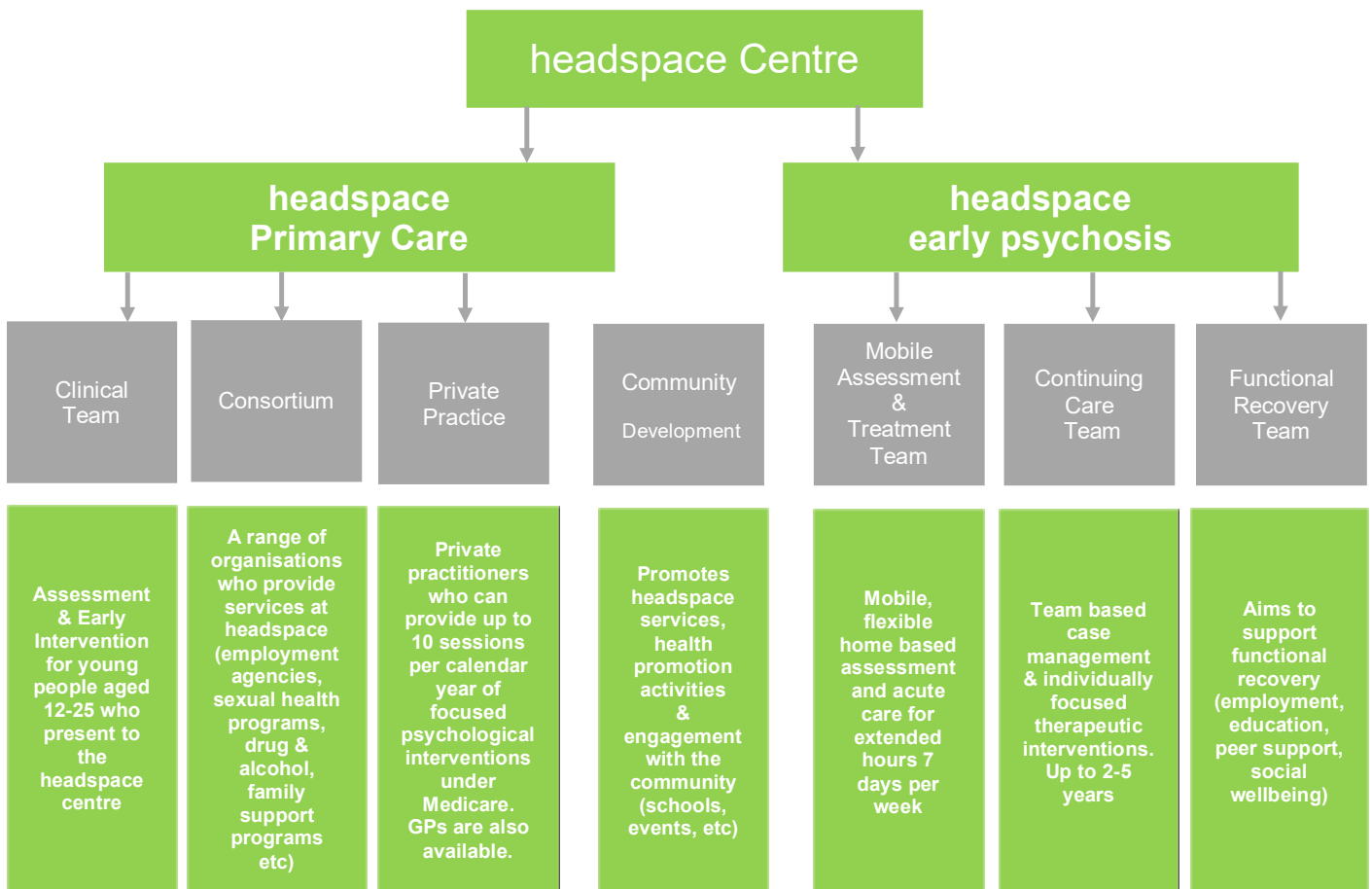
I n t e r r e l a t e

Interrelate will provide emotional support to a parent or carer through counselling services and also group information sessions. This can be regarding the family members mental health or to work on the relationships of the family.



headspace programs for young people

There are two different programs offered by headspace Mt Druitt, headspace Penrith and headspace Early Psychosis. Each has its individual services and teams as set out in the diagram below:



Primary Care	Early Psychosis
Provides young people 12-25 with access, support and information for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health • Physical Health • Drug and Alcohol • Employment and Education 	Provides intervention for young people from 12-25 who are at Ultra High Risk (UHR) or are experiencing their First Episode of Psychosis (FEP). Utilising a holistic approach to the care of young people and their families – looking at all facets of the young person’s life.

In addition, both young people as well as their family & friends can directly participate to ensure headspace services are both relevant and youth / family & friend friendly. There is the opportunity for both young people as well as family & friends to get involved with headspace through a **“Youth Advisory Committee”** & **“Family & Friends Committee”**. These Committees provide consultation and guidance on the direction and development of headspace services across the relevant headspace sites. Please ask reception for the relevant contact details if interested.

headspace Terminology: Who are we and what do we do?

- **Alcohol and drug workers** – are consortium partners and provide support services to people presenting with drug and alcohol issues. These services can include assessment, intervention and counselling. They may also act as advocates by promoting awareness of drug and alcohol services and health education.
- **Clinicians** – every young person who comes through the program will be allocated a clinician. This clinician will be the centre of their care and their main point of contact. Clinicians are made up of psychologists, occupational therapists, social workers and allied health professionals.
- **Family therapist** – provides counselling and support to the young person and their families individually or together. This is intensive therapy looks at family dynamics and how they can help in the young person's recovery.
- **Functional Recovery Team (FRT)** – this team focuses on the young person's goals through peer support, social activities, groups, study and recovery plans. The team consists of peer supports coaches, Vocational Educational Co-ordinators, social workers, dance, art, music and drama therapists.
- **headspace Primary Care (hPC)** – this team provides young people with short term support and information concerning mental health, physical health, drug and alcohol and employment and education.
- **headspace Early Psychosis** – a program that provides services for young people at high risk or experiencing their first episode of psychosis. The program ranges from 6 months to 3-5 years and consists of case managers, psychiatrists, functional recovery support and peer workers.
- **Mobile Assessment and Treatment Team (MATT)** – this team provides initial treatment and assessment when a young person is first referred to headspace. They also provide support during times of crisis or when additional support is needed. This team consists of a psychiatrist, social workers, nurses and other allied health professionals.
- **Peer support coach** – both youth and carer – these people use their unique experiences of their mental health journey to provide hope and support to both young people and their family and friends currently accessing Headspace services.
- **Psychiatrist** - are medical doctors who are experts in mental health. They specialise in diagnosing, prescribing medication and treating people with mental illness. They have a deep understanding of physical and mental health – and how they affect each other. They also help people with more complex mental health conditions such as schizophrenia, depression, bipolar disorder, eating disorders and addiction.
- **Vocational educational co-ordinators (VEC)** – offer young people assistance with their job interview skills, update their resume, explore their skills and identify training that they might want to pursue.
- **Young people** – people between 12 – 25 years of age.

consent, privacy and confidentiality in a young person's care at headspace

Who can consent to a young person receiving services from headspace and confidentiality?

headspace is a voluntary service and clinicians can only provide treatment to young people who give their consent.

If the young person is under the age of 16, consent for receiving services at headspace will be required to be given by their parents and/or guardian and relevant information about them will be shared with parents and/or guardian unless we believe the young person is able to make independent decisions about their support and treatment.

If the young person is 16 or over and we believe the young person is able to make independent decisions about their support and treatment, we will only supply information to family and friends that the young person gives us permission to supply.

If the young person states that they do not want their family/carers to be told about what has been discussed in a session, this will be respected by the clinician. Importantly, however, headspace recognises that family/carers often play a critical role in the wellbeing of their young person and are intimately involved in supporting them with their mental health issues. Accordingly, where appropriate, clinicians will actively encourage the young person towards collaboration with family/carers and friends, including involving them in developing and implementing care/treatment plans.

What will be my role in my young person's treatment at headspace?

Both the family and friends and the clinician share the same goal: to see the young person recover and reach their full potential.

For counselling to be effective, it is necessary that the clinician develop and maintain a relationship of trust with the young person. This necessarily involves maintaining confidentiality and, where possible, following the wishes of the young person.

Therefore, where the young person is happy to involve the family and friends in the sessions, it will be usual for the clinician to see the young person by themselves initially, inviting others in afterwards to discuss progress and strategies for improving the young person's mental health.

If, however, the young person states that they do not want their family and friends involved in the session, this will be respected by the clinician. Importantly, headspace recognises that family and friends often play a critical role in the wellbeing of their young person and are intimately involved in supporting them with their mental health issues. As stated above, clinicians will encourage collaboration where appropriate.

Finally, if you have concerns around a parent involved in contested family law proceedings accessing the young person's files, please speak to the clinician or manager in charge of headspace. Their priority will always be maintaining confidentiality of the young person within the frame of the law.

Can I ask my young person how they are going after their sessions?

It's understandable that you may want to know how the young person's session went. Perhaps ask general questions and how they are feeling, but it is advisable to not ask exactly what was spoken about. They will share with you what they want to. This will hopefully strengthen your young person's relationship with their clinician, knowing that what they discuss is private.

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Carers

Moving to a new country and starting a whole new life can be tough. You may experience some culture shock or you may struggle with some language barriers. You may be finding a new job or perhaps a new social circle. With all these changes people sometimes feel alone in everything and isolated from the community. With all these hardships you may be battling a new one with your loved one experiencing mental illness. Seeking help can be challenging. Perhaps there is an associated stigma with mental health in your community or you may be struggling with navigating the system and seeking help due to language barriers. You may feel unable to support your young person.

It's okay to feel this way. However, you are not alone.

Your young person has taken a major first step in seeking help and by reaching out to you, they are showing that they trust you. We are here to help.

How can headspace help my young person?

When your young person first visits headspace, a clinician will meet with your young person to understand their individual needs and work with your young person to create an individualised support plan based on their goals. headspace will work to support your young person on their path to recovery.

Can I be involved with my young person's journey at headspace?

It is understandable that you are concerned about your young person and would wish to know the details of your young person's headspace visits. The clinician is however legally required to maintain confidentiality regarding specific matters discussed if your young person is over 16 and has not consented to sharing this information with you. Should you wish to understand how you can support your young person or wish to broadly understand their mental health concerns, you can speak with the clinician who will direct you to the right support such as our family carer peer support coaches.

I am unable to understand what my young person is going through. Is there someone I can speak with?

It can be hard to understand your loved one's pain if you have no lived experience of a mental illness. Understanding that you may not be seeing the full picture of your young person's distress is a good place to start your journey of supporting your young person. The numbers below can help you get in contact with the right people to support your needs.

- Mental Health Carers NSW: 1300 554 660 (free call)
- Carers NSW: 1800 242 636 (free call)

Speak to the reception to connect with the right support for more resources and guidance in this process. Additionally, you can refer to the "List of Services" document in this pack.

How can I facilitate conversation with my young person?

You may be finding it hard to communicate with your young person. Your young person is experiencing immense pain. This is a tough and unstable time in their life. Do not take their behavior towards you personally. Respect their need for space and be a non-judgmental friendly ear for when they need someone to speak with. If you need further assistance with understanding how best to support your young person, please contact the above numbers. Additionally, you may speak with the headspace family counseling team or the peer carer support coaches.

I struggle with English. Can I speak with someone who speaks my language?

If you require a translator, please speak with someone at the headspace reception. Additionally, the Transcultural Mental Health Centre provides mental health information in a variety of languages.

This is a stressful time for both you and your young person. It is okay for you to seek help.

It may seem selfish to take some time out for yourself. However, you will only be able to support your young person if you yourself feel well rested. Your young person needs you and there is only so much you can do before you start to feel exhausted. So, take a break, press pause and indulge in some activities that help you feel relaxed. That may be a relaxing walk or some quiet time with a book. Whatever you fancy! There are no rules when it comes to self-care!

caring for a friend

You have just learnt that your friend is not okay. You may feel overwhelmed with this information. You may feel unsure of your ability to help your friend out. You may feel like you need to talk to someone but might be afraid of betraying your friend's trust.

It's okay to feel this way. It can be scary to see someone you love struggling. Your friend trusts you, which is why they have shared their pain with you. You don't have to feel like you need to solve their problem. Sometimes people just need someone who can be a kind, non-judgmental listening ear. That's you! You have already made the first step by having a tough conversation with your friend. Now what's next?

We can help!

What happens when I bring my friend to headspace?

When your friend first visits headspace a clinician will meet with your friend in order to understand their needs. The clinician will then work with your friend to build a support plan based on their goals.

Can I check in on them?

What we discuss with your friend, and what they share with us is confidential. If you're having any concerns or questions about yourself or your friend, speak to the receptionist who will connect you with the right supports such as our family carer peer support coaches.

What happens if my friend doesn't want me to tell anyone that they are not okay?

Your friend may not want any adults to know as they may fear judgement or may be concerned with what they may do with this information. Your friend has however shared this information with you. This is a first step for them to seek help. While you may respect their wishes to not have their family involved you can let them know that you are concerned about them and think they may benefit from seeking some professional help. You could help them with booking an appointment or accompany them to their first appointment. Hearing them out and taking the conversation seriously will only increase their trust in you.

I want to speak with someone. I'm not really sure how to have this conversation or what to do. Who can I call?

No worries - we understand. If you are unsure what to do after your conversation with your friend, you can speak to reception to connect to the right support. Additionally, you can seek online help via eheadspace. You may also ring these numbers:

- Kids helpline on 1800 55 1800 - This helpline is staffed with professionals who will hear you out with regards to any concerns you may have.
- Carers NSW on 1800 242 636 - The Young carers program is also staffed with professionals who can help you understand your caring role.

Everyone's recovery journey is different. Your friend may need your support and understanding during their journey. If at any point you feel overwhelmed, understand that it is not selfish for you to take some time out for yourself. This is a stressful time for you and your friend. In order for you to support your friend you need to indulge in some self-care, or you may feel burnt out. So, enjoy that relaxing walk, listen to your favorite music, enjoy a delicious brownie or whatever helps you feel at ease!

impact of a young person's mental health illness on the broader family unit

This fact sheet is for the broader family unit of the young person with a mental health illness addressing the role families have on a young person's recovery journey, how families may be affected, what to do in a crisis, self-care and where to find support and additional resources.

Families play a significant role on a young person's recovery journey.

The word 'family' is used in this fact sheet to describe any relative or loved one who cares about the person seeking help with their mental health. This could include parents, siblings, grandparents, foster families, partners, friends and extended family members. There are many difficulties that a family can face when supporting their loved one through their recovery journey such as relationship, emotional and behavioural difficulties. A few ways you can overcome these difficulties are learning when to take a break by engaging in self-care, educating yourself about your family member's illness, joining a support group and seeking professional help if and when you need it.

How are families affected?

Mental health illness often has a ripple effect on families, creating tension, uncertainty, troubled emotions and big changes in how people live their lives. Different family members are likely to be affected in different ways. Families are often the primary support for people affected by mental illness. Looking after a family member with a mental illness can be an extremely stressful time and coping with the stress may cause various reactions such as somatic problems (migraines, loss of appetite, fatigue and/or insomnia), cognitive and emotional problems (anxiety, depression, guilt, fear, anger and/or confusion) and behavioural problems (changes in attitude and/or social withdrawal). Family members feeling confused, stressed, angry or sad when thinking about their loved one's wellbeing is normal behaviour.

Siblings can develop a strong, two-way, loving relationship. It is important to remember that the onset of a person's mental illness can affect other siblings greatly. Siblings may experience family stigma that family life revolves around their sibling with a mental illness, personal shame or 'survivor guilt'. These are all normal feelings especially if the sibling is intimately involved in supporting their loved one through their recovery journey. There are many ways siblings can themselves get support when dealing with their sibling's mental health illness. The local GP can provide family members with a mental health care plan and direct them to local services such as a psychologist, a school counsellor, Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800 and/or headspace to provide support for siblings.

What to do in a crisis

A crisis is someone's personal reaction to an event or experience in their life they find hard to cope with. If your loved one is in a crisis call 000 or go straight to your hospital's local emergency department. There can be long wait times within the hospital system and they may not always have the support needed available, such as appropriate beds and doctors. Sometimes you may be turned away with nowhere to go once the crisis has settled. There are many crisis numbers which can be called. (Refer to the "List of Services" document). These numbers can provide people with assistance, non-judgemental support and resources in their time of need. It is important to support a loved one when they are in a crisis. Listen to them, do not leave them alone and encourage them to get support.

Self-Care for Families

Self-care includes activities and practices an individual engages in on a regular basis to reduce stress and enhance wellbeing. Families must practice self-care and continue to look after themselves, so they are able to look after and care for their loved ones. Self-care can be different for everyone but could include setting boundaries, speaking up for oneself, seeking help, exercising, seeing friends, listening to music, meditation, resting, etc. Self-care can be anything that can positively makes a person feel calm, happy and rested.

Where can you find support?

If you or someone you love needs support, please visit your local GP to get a Mental Health Care Plan. Your GP will recommend allied health professionals you could access. Other services that provide support includes The Family Relationships Advice Line on 1800 050 321, which can provide information to support families going through a tough time and Interrelate on 1300 473 538, which provides support to parents and children to strengthen relationships. You can also speak to reception within headspace to connect to the right support such as a Peer Support Coach or the Family Therapist.

Additional resources

Books:

- The Family Guide to Mental Health Care, Sederer, L.I (2015)
- Helping someone with a mental illness: a compassionate guide for family, friends and caregivers, Rosalyn, C (2011)
- How to cope when a loved one has a serious mental illness, Glynn, S.M. Kangask K + Pickett, S (2018)
- Supporting a Family Member with Serious Mental Illness, Glynn, S.M. Kangask K + Pickett, S (2018)
- Understanding Mental Disorders; Your guide to DSM-5, Patrick Kennedy (2015)

Website Links:

- Lifeline, Get Help Resources, <https://www.lifeline.org.au/get-help/get-help-home>
- Raising Children, Parents and Family Services, 2019, <https://raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/parent-family-services>
- Nunn, Kenneth. (2011). Mental health issues Feeling sad – doing bad – scared I'm mad', The Children's Hospital at Westmead, NSW Australia, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232242663_Mental_health_issues_Feeling_sad_-_doing_bad_-_scared_I

We understand there are many other resources available and this is just a selection. We are trying to build an extensive library of resources to help families on this journey. If you have any more additional resources on mental health, mental illness or supporting families please contact the Family Carer Peer Support Coach Cait Watts on caitlin.watts@parramattamission.org.au

Family, Friends & Carers

Questions & Answers

What is headspace?

headspace is a national federally funded service with over 100 locations across Australia. It provides free mental health & related services for 12 to 25 year-olds. It focuses on mild to moderate mental health difficulties and early intervention. Young people may be referred to other appropriate services if they have more complex or specific needs.

What is the role of Family, Friends & Carers?

headspace is a family, friends & carer-inclusive service. Your engagement and support of the young person's journey is encouraged. Maintaining and building on your connection with the young person as a support is often important. The extent to which you are involved is clearly a personal choice & is led by the wishes of your young person.

Are there wait times & how long are they?

headspace tries to see the young person for their first appointment as soon as possible, however wait times vary & if the service is busy they may have to wait for several weeks. In the interim, the young person should seek crisis assistance through various mental health lines if required. *Refer to the "List of Services" document in this pack.*

Following the first appointment, the next appointment will be made.

eheadspace (eheadspace.org.au) is an alternative service for both young people and carers that would prefer to access support services online or on the telephone (on 1800 650 890)

How many appointments can the young person have? How long will they be in the program?

The standard program, referred to as '*Primary Care*', involves attendance for up to 10 free sessions.

If the young person is placed in a more specialised '*Early Psychosis*' program, they will remain in the program for longer, normally between 6 months and up to 2-5 years.

Mental Health Care Plans – what are they?

This is a simple document prepared by a GP. It allows up to 10 clinical sessions to be claimed through Medicare for a 12 month period. At **headspace**, it is not always necessary that you have a Mental Health Care Plan. Either way there will be no out-of-pocket expense to the young person using services. It's free.

Who will the young person be seeing / working with?

There are various clinicians that work at the **headspace** sites. *Refer to the document "headspace Terminology: Who are we and what do we do?" in this pack.* The young person may work in a one-on-one setting and in small groups. The objective is to have consistency with the clinician they see, to enable the formation of a trusting connection in a safe environment.

What if the young person doesn't like the clinician?

If the young person doesn't like their clinician, it is fine to ask for another one (this will not cause offence) to facilitate the young person getting the most effective help they need. Although this may be challenging, encourage the young person to take this step. Feel free to speak to reception or seek assistance from a Peer Support coach.

What if the young person doesn't like attending group clinical sessions?

Group sessions are often used at **headspace**. This can be a challenge for some young people and may require some gentle encouragement. Many find they get a lot out of group sessions and make connection with others going through a similar journey. However, the clinician can discuss alternatives for a young person who feels uncomfortable in the group setting.

What if the young person is feeling worse after the session?

Sessions can often stir up feelings. Many feel better from the opportunity to talk through their issues, but for others this is more challenging and negative feelings may surface. If you are concerned, raise this with the clinician and never hesitate for you or the young person to reach out to crisis lines for support as required. *Refer to the "List of Services" document in this pack.*

What is the goal or objective of the headspace service?

The underlying objective is to provide support and empowerment to the young person, enabling positive steps in their recovery journey. Although this may be a distressing time and each situation will be different, with the right professional help and support many others have worked their way through this recovery process. Remain positive and maintain hope for the future.

What if I need help myself?

Worrying about your young person is tough, so you need to maintain your own health and wellbeing (referred to as 'self-care'). It will also help to make you a calmer and more effective support person. If you need help, support or guidance there are many services available. *Refer to the "List of Services" document in this pack.*

I would like to get involved with helping headspace? What can I do?

There is the opportunity for family, friends & carers to get involved with headspace through a "Family & Friends Committee". The Committee provides consultation and guidance on the direction and development of headspace services across the various headspace sites. If you are interested in being involved, please ask reception for the relevant contact details.

list of headspace fact sheet & brochures

There are a whole lot of Fact Sheet resources that are available, including at headspace reception, that may be useful to you.

headspace Fact Sheets	
Alcohol	Sex and Sexual Health
Anger	Sexuality and Mental Health
Anxiety	Tips for a healthy headspace
Bipolar	Get into Life
Bullying	Learn how to handle tough times
Dealing with Relationships	Build Close and Connected Relationships
Depression	Eat well
Eating Disorders	Get Enough Sleep
Gender Identity and Mental Health	Cut back on Alcohol and Other Drugs
Getting help from a GP	Stay Active
Grief	What is Mental Health
If your friend is not okay	Health Internet Gaming
Psychosis	Screen Time
PTSD	Understanding Gaming
Self-Harm	Sleep and Gaming



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.

Need help now?

If someone you care about is in crisis, call triple zero (000). You can also go to your local hospital emergency department. Remember to stay with the person until they are able to access professional support.

If you are feeling overwhelmed and need to speak to someone now, contact:

- **Lifeline:** 13 11 14 or [lifeline.org.au](#)
- **Suicide Call Back Service:** 1300 659 467 or [suicidecallbackservice.org.au](#)

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



how to help

a friend going through a tough time

When you know a friend is going through
a tough time, it can be hard to know what to do or say.

Helping a friend who's having a tough time

When you see a friend having a tough time, it's a good idea to reach out and offer support. You might have noticed they don't seem like themselves, or they're not acting the way they normally do. Finding the words to start a conversation isn't easy, especially when you don't know what kind of help you can offer. It can make a big difference to someone experiencing difficulties.

It can be as simple as checking in, letting them know that you care and that you're there to help them. Let your friend know what changes you've noticed, that you're worried about them and that you'd like to help.

Even if they don't open up much at first, simply showing you have their back can give your friend strength and hope. This also tells them that you're someone they can talk to if they do decide to open up later on.

What if my friend doesn't want any help?

Some friends need time and space before they feel ready to get support. Being afraid of things changing or being judged, can be a big factor in why people don't seek support when they need it.

You may need to be patient with your friend and try not to judge them or get frustrated if you can't get through to them at first. Remind them that you are there if they need you. Give them time.

Sometimes you might need to involve someone else – this may be a trusted adult. If you do decide to tell someone, try to let your friend know that you're planning on doing this first and encourage them to get involved in the discussion.

Letting someone else know can be a difficult decision to make, especially if they don't want help. You might be worried they may lose trust in you. There's a chance your friend might feel like this at first but remind them it's only because you care. In the long run, they will usually understand why you got someone else involved.

If your friend is at risk of harming themselves or somebody else, you need to seek help straight away, even if they ask you not to. If your friend needs urgent help you can call 000. You could also ask someone you trust, such as a parent or teacher for help.

What can I say to help my friend with their mental health?

It's important to encourage your friend to get further support. You can say things like:

- 'Have you talked to anyone else about this? It's great you've talked to me, but it might be good to get advice and support from a health worker.'
- 'It doesn't have to be super intense and you can make choices about what's best for you.'
- 'Your GP (general practitioner) can actually help you with this stuff. You can find one that bulk bills, so you don't have to pay. I can go along with you, if you want?'
- 'There are some great websites you can check out to get more information. Have you heard of headspace or ReachOut or youthbeyondblue?'
- 'Did you know that you can get free and confidential support online or over the phone from places like headspace, Kids Helpline and Lifeline? All of these services are anonymous and can help you figure out what's going on for you and where to go for the right support.'
- 'I know you're not feeling great now, but with the right support, you can get through this. Lots of people do.'
- 'It's OK to feel this way and I'm here to have your back.' Make sure you validate your friend's concern and let them know they're not alone.

Looking after yourself

Supporting a friend through a tough time can be difficult, so it's important that you take care of yourself, too. You can check out our tips for a healthy headspace fact sheets to look after your own wellbeing and build your mental fitness every day.

Try to remember that you're their friend and not their counsellor. Be realistic about what you can and can't do. Set boundaries for yourself to make sure that you're doing the best thing for yourself, your friend and the friendship.

If you're feeling overwhelmed and need support for you, it might be a good time to reach out for extra help. A good place to start is a trusted adult (e.g., family member, teacher or GP). You can also contact Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800).



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](https://www.headspace.org.au)



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understanding your sexuality and sexual identity

(The way you want to describe your sexuality, and who you share that with, is completely up to you.)

Sexuality is about how you see and express yourself romantically and sexually. There are lots of words people use to describe their sexuality, many of which are captured by the term LGBTIQA+.

What does LGBTIQA+ mean?

- **L** – lesbian (a female who is attracted to females)
- **G** – gay (someone who is attracted to people of the same gender)
- **B** – bisexual (someone who is attracted to people of more than one gender)
- **T** – transgender or trans people (someone whose personal and gender identity is different from the one they were assigned at birth)
- **I** – intersex (someone who is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that falls outside the typical definitions of 'male' and 'female')
- **Q** – queer (this term has many different meanings, but it has been reclaimed by many as a proud term to describe sexuality or gender that is anything other than cisgender and/or heterosexual)
- **A** – asexual (someone who has low or no sexual attraction to any gender, but may have a romantic attraction towards another person)/aromantic (someone who experiences little or no romantic attraction to others)
- **+ –** (this acknowledges there are many other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities).



The language around LGBTIQA+ has changed over time and will continue to evolve as society further develops understanding of people's different experiences. This is why the '+' is so important.

What if I'm not sure of my sexuality?

It's common for young people to be unsure of their sexuality (questioning) or to experience fluid sexuality (when someone's sexuality changes over time). Many young people prefer to identify as queer, as it's broader and does not place someone into a category.

Others might not like the idea of these terms and don't want to identify their sexuality at all and that's OK too. It's important to remember that your identity is yours. The way you want to describe it, and who you share that with, is completely up to you.

How do I explain it to others?

Coming out or inviting others in. The idea of coming out or sharing your sexuality with others can feel really scary.



Some people prefer to think of the experience as inviting others in rather than coming out.

Some people, due to safety, might choose not to share their sexuality with certain people around them. Everyone's journey looks different.

It's hard to know what other people will think or how they'll react when you talk to them about your sexuality. Unfortunately, it's not something you can control.

Not all people will have a consistently positive experience if they come out. Here are some things to consider when discussing your sexuality with others.

- Have the conversation when you feel ready.
- It's up to you to choose who you want to tell and what you want to tell them.
- You may want to suss people out first – perhaps by asking them for their thoughts on an LGBTIQ+ topic, like a TV show with a queer character.
- Have the conversation when everyone is comfortable and relaxed.
- Expect a range of reactions. People might surprise you.
- Give it time. Some people might respond better when they've thought about it for a while.
- Try to keep calm, even if the other person is not.
- If you need to call a time-out, have a plan in place. You could say something like, 'I still want to talk more about this but we're too worked up at the moment'.
- Responses can range from tolerance, to acceptance, to celebration. There may be others who don't accept your sexual identity no matter how you share it or how much time goes by. This can be painful, especially if it's someone you love or respect. But remember, you don't need anyone's approval or permission to be yourself.

Dealing with discrimination. If you're being unfairly treated because of your sexuality, this is called discrimination. Although discrimination is illegal in Australia, many young people still experience unfair treatment. If you have been affected by discrimination or any of these negative experiences, it's important to reach out for support.

Taking care of yourself

People exploring their sexuality may be faced with challenges that can affect their mental health and wellbeing, such as:

- other people making them feel 'different'
- fear of rejection
- bullying
- discrimination such as homophobia and biphobia (verbal or physical)
- feeling pressure to deny or change their sexuality
- worries about coming out to friends and family members
- feeling unsupported or misunderstood
- being excluded or left out at school, work or in the community
- a desire to suppress or avoid unwanted preferences.

If someone makes you feel badly about your sexuality, there are things you can do to take care of yourself.

Find a supportive community

It's important to remember that there is a strong LGBTIQ+ community to embrace and support you. Finding these communities can be tough, but be assured that they're out there! A simple Google search can help you find local support groups. Everyone deserves to be surrounded by people who understand them, so it's useful to meet people with similar experiences to you.

Reach out for help

If you're finding it hard to cope and your social, work or school life is being affected, then it's time to ask for help. A trusted family member or friend, teacher or coach can help or recommend someone to talk to.

Look after your mental health and wellbeing by:

- visiting the headspace website for tips for healthy headspace
- connecting with the LGBTIQ+ community through social groups and online communities
- checking out online support services, such as Qlife or ReachOut.



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](https://www.headspace.org.au)



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what is gender identity?

Gender identity is how you perceive your gender, how you show this to others, and how you express yourself.

About gender identity

The physical features you were born with (sex assigned at birth) don't necessarily define your gender. Although gender has traditionally been divided into 'male' and 'female', it's becoming more widely recognised that gender is not that simple and there are a diverse range of gender identities.

For example, you could identify with a gender that's different from the sex you were assigned at birth, such as:

- being assigned female at birth, but you identify as a male
- being assigned male at birth, but identifying as a female
- you identify somewhere between male and female
- you recognise yourself as another gender identity.



"It's important to know that gender diversity does not cause mental health problems."

Dani, hY NRG member
(headspace Youth National Reference Group)

Young people who are gender diverse, or do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth, can live fulfilling lives but, discrimination and transphobia – along with a lack of understanding or acceptance – may lead to an increased risk of mental health difficulties.

Why is this difficult for me?

Some common experiences that can affect your wellbeing and increase your vulnerability to developing mental health difficulties are:

- feeling 'different' from other people around you
- transphobic bullying whether verbal or physical
- feeling pressure to define or deny your feelings regarding your gender identity
- feeling unsupported or worried that your gender identity will not be accepted by friends and family members
- fearing the possibility of being rejected or isolated
- feeling stressed and anxious with the pressure to conform with your sex assigned at birth.



The way you want to describe your gender and sexuality, and who you share that with, is completely up to you.

Finding a supportive community

Sometimes when you're questioning your gender, it can feel isolating and confusing, especially when you don't have a network of people who understand what you're going through.

It might be nice to know that the trans – and greater LGBTIQ+ – community stretches across the world, and can be welcoming and diverse. Finding these communities can be tough, but be assured that they're out there! A simple Google search can help you find local support groups. If you're questioning who you are, there are people just like you. Everyone deserves to be surrounded by people who understand them, so it's useful to meet people with similar experiences to you.

Transphobic discrimination

Transphobic discrimination is about being treated differently or excluded because of your gender identity. People's prejudices can make it difficult to maintain good wellbeing. It can also make it hard to ask for help, or know where to turn for help, when problems come up.

Getting the right help and support

While it's normal to occasionally experience some of these things, if you're finding it hard to cope and your social, work or school life is being affected, then it's time to ask for help.

Getting help when problems develop can reduce the effects of mental health problems and prevent more serious issues developing in the future.



Some transgender or gender diverse young people find it especially hard to ask for help.

This might be because of discrimination by health professionals in the past, worries about privacy, or difficulty talking to strangers about gender identity.

It's important to find someone you can trust to support you throughout your journey. This might be your general practitioner (GP) and/or other health professionals experienced in working with gender diverse young people.

headspace can also help connect you with specialists for specific needs around gender transition if you decide to go down that path.

A trusted friend, teacher or family member might also be able to recommend someone to talk to. It can take time to find the health professional who is right for you, so don't give up if you don't find the right person straight away. Remember that you don't have to discuss your gender identity if you don't feel comfortable or safe.

You're not alone.

There are many young people exploring and questioning their gender identity. If you want to talk through any questions or concerns about your gender identity, there are people who can help and support you.



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](https://www.headspace.org.au)



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understanding psychosis

Psychosis is an experience where a person has problems interpreting the real world. They might see or hear things that other people can't, or have unusual ideas or beliefs.



Psychosis is often frightening for the person going through it and misunderstood by those around them. But it can be treated. Most people who experience psychosis make a good recovery and go on to lead healthy, productive lives.

Psychosis is a serious issue that calls for professional clinical help – it can have a big impact on a person's life and should never be ignored. It's important to get help early to increase chances for a quicker, more complete recovery.

What are the symptoms of psychosis?

Confused thinking: Everyday thoughts can become confused, making it hard to understand or express ideas. A person might find it hard to concentrate, follow a conversation or remember things. Thoughts can seem to speed up or slow down.

False beliefs (delusions): A person can have strong beliefs in things that aren't real to other people. They might believe that they're being followed, that someone is trying to harm them, or that they're getting secret messages from TV. This can be very scary for the person and impact their behaviour.

Hallucinations: A person may hear or see something that isn't actually there. Sometimes other senses like touch, smell or taste can also be affected. For example, they might:

- hear noises or voices that aren't there
- see things that seem strange, like faces in objects or shadows at the window
- have a strange taste in their mouth
- smell things others can't
- feel things on their skin that are not there.

Changed emotions: A person may feel strange and cut off from the world. They may seem to feel less emotion or show less emotion to those around them.

Changed behaviour: A person may be extremely active or find it hard getting the energy to do things. They might laugh when things don't seem funny or become angry or upset without any obvious reason. The person may stop doing the things they used to do like hanging out with friends and family. The person can seem excited, depressed or irritable for little or no reason obvious to others.

Symptoms of psychosis are different for everyone. They might not be present all the time, have different causes and can change over time.

What are the types of psychosis?

Experiencing psychotic symptoms doesn't necessarily mean that someone has a psychotic illness.

- About three in every 100 people are diagnosed with a psychotic illness at some stage in their life.
- More than three quarters of psychotic experiences don't progress to a diagnosable illness.
- A person is most likely to have their first episode of psychosis in their late teens or early twenties.

Many people assume that people experiencing psychosis have schizophrenia, but there are lots of illnesses that have psychotic symptoms, including:

- brief psychotic disorder
- substance/medication-induced psychotic disorder
- bipolar disorder
- major depression with psychotic features
- delusional disorder
- schizophrenia.

Because people's symptoms often change over time, the type of disorder often changes, too. Sometimes people are diagnosed with one thing, and then later the diagnosis is changed or removed if they don't fit the criteria for that disorder anymore.

What causes psychosis?

Like lots of mental health difficulties, psychosis is caused by a combination of different things. Things like genetics (inherited from parents) and a history of tough times (like trauma and childhood experiences) can make a person more vulnerable to psychosis.

Things people are exposed to in life (or 'stressors') can also contribute to developing a psychosis. They include:

- drug use
- grief and loss
- difficult times with family or friends
- problems at school or work.

Recovering from psychosis

The recovery journey is different for everyone. Just like with any illness, recovering from psychosis can be an ongoing process. It's not just about getting rid of the symptoms – it's about learning to enjoy life while managing the tough times when they happen.

How is psychosis treated?

Treatments for psychosis usually include:

- counselling
- medication
- education about psychosis
- support from family, community and/or mob
- practical support to get back to school or work.

When recovering from psychosis, it's really important to take care of yourself. Avoiding drugs and learning better ways to cope with stress can help stop the symptoms from coming back in the future.

How do I help someone experiencing psychosis?

It can be frightening to experience psychosis. Try to be calm. Help the person feel safe and access the right support.

- Ask them what's happening for them. They may say things that sound strange. Listen carefully – don't feel you need to try to 'talk them out of' these ideas.
- Remember the person may be responding to experiences that you're not aware of.
- Connect with the emotion the person is experiencing, as opposed to the idea, if you can. Asking how they feel about the experience they're having can help if you're not sure what to say.
- Encourage the young person to get professional treatment as early as possible. Offer to go with them or help them connect with services.
- Look after yourself, get some support if you need and practise good self-care.



If someone is suggesting they will harm themselves or you're concerned they might not be safe, call your local mental health service or 000 urgently to arrange specialist attention. Acute mental health teams are specially trained to assist people experiencing psychosis in crisis.



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](https://www.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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