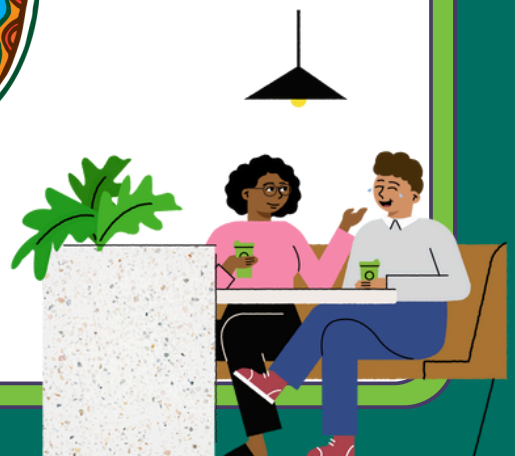
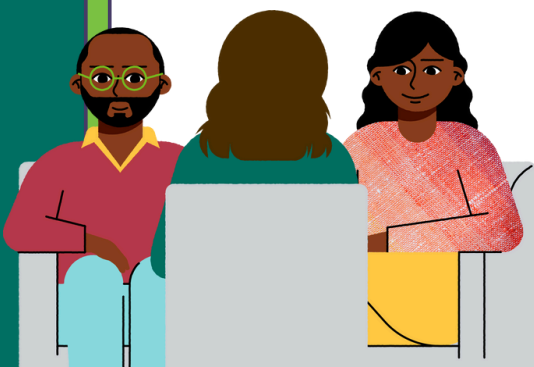


headspace resources for parents and carers





the facts:
getting help



headspace
National Youth Mental Health Foundation

an overview of mental health for family and friends

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.

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're supported by their family, friends and health professionals early on.

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 studies, money issues, difficult personal relationships, challenges within the family
- serious illness or physical injury
- alcohol and other drugs use and experimentation.



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.

Signs to look out for

Family and friends 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 needs 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 eating 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, uni or work
- loss of energy
- experiencing difficulties with their concentration
- an increase in risk taking behaviour, e.g., using alcohol and /or other drugs, dangerous driving, unprotected sexual activity
- being unusually stressed, worried, down or crying for no apparent reason
- expressing negative, distressing, bizarre or unusual thoughts.



How to support your young person

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, attentively, and don't rush to problem solving
- check in often with your young person.

Encourage activities that promote good mental health

Tips that promote good mental health include:

- connecting with others
- staying active
- eating well
- limiting alcohol and other drug use
- getting into life
- sleeping well
- 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 eheadspace and support them to engage/offer to go with them.
- 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.
- If you're worried they might self-harm you can ask directly, try to understand their reasons and encourage them to seek professional support.

Self-care for family and friends

Caring for a loved one who is experiencing a tough time can impact on your health and wellbeing. Looking after yourself is important as it can leave you better placed to provide support to your young person. Get 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

- [beyondblue](#)
- [SANE Australia](#)
- [Parent helplines \(Google 'Parentline' along with your State or Territory\)](#)
- [eheadspace \(online and phone support\)](#)
- [your local headspace centre can direct you to some Family and Friends support groups](#)

Family and friends can provide vital support for young people when they are having a tough time.



Getting support

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're able to access professional support.

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

- [Lifeline on 13 11 14](#)
- [the Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467](#)



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE 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](#).

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





starting a conversation with a young person about mental health

Conversations about mental health are helpful

Family and friends play a vital role in identifying and supporting a young person who's experiencing the impacts of mental ill-health.

Let your young person know that you care about them no matter what they're going through. This is important and helps encourage young people to seek support early to manage the impact of mental ill-health.

Evidence has shown that having supportive loved ones involved in mental health care creates and improves longer lasting, positive outcomes for young people.

Conversations about mental health can be challenging

Talking to young people about mental health can feel hard, especially when you or your young person are uncomfortable talking about sensitive topics like mental health.

There is no 'right way' to have these conversations. Different approaches work better for different people. It's OK to feel unsure about how or when to start these conversations. No one gets these conversations perfect but taking the time to learn more is a great start.

How do I know I need to have a conversation about mental ill-health?

Family members and friends can often tell when something isn't quite right. You might notice that a young person is acting differently, or there are changes to their behaviour.



If you notice changes, it's a good time to have a conversation about what might be happening in their life.

Tips for having the conversation

Having a conversation can feel overwhelming. Here are some tips for talking with your young person.

1. Check in with yourself

- Ensure that you're feeling calm and open to listening.
- Consider if it is the right time to have the conversation.
- Be aware of your body language and tone of voice.

2. Setting the scene

- Think about where.
- It can help to be side-by-side rather than looking directly at each other. Perhaps go for a drive, a walk, or somewhere your young person feels comfortable.

3. Be prepared to listen

- Listening to your young person is an important part of the process.
- Take their feelings seriously. Listen carefully, reflect back and don't judge (it can be more useful at times to say nothing than to offer solutions).
- Take a 'you and me vs the problem' approach. This lets them know you'll figure it out together.

4. Starting the conversation

- There are many ways to start the conversation. You could begin with general and open questions like: how is [e.g., school/sport] going?
- When focusing on more specific thoughts and feelings, 'I' statements are important: 'I feel like you/I've noticed you [haven't been yourself lately] – how are things?'

How you talk with your young person will depend on their age and understanding. The language you use should feel natural. If your young person talks about their mental health, reassure them that you're glad and relieved that they're talking to you, you're proud of them, and they're not alone in their journey.



To learn more about these tips visit the link via the QR code on the next page.

What if I am concerned about their safety?

If you are concerned about someone's safety it is important that you talk to them directly.

Here are some tips to help you:

- talk openly and honestly (this helps show them that you care)
- let them know that you are concerned about their safety
- acknowledge the difficulty of opening up about thoughts or feelings and reassure them it can help
- reassure them that you'll be there for them and ask what they need from you (they might not know what they need)
- if you're worried about suicide, ask direct questions, such as 'have you ever thought about suicide/ending your life?' (If you're not sure how you might feel hearing 'yes' to this question, seek professional support to help you manage the conversation)
- if you're worried they might self harm you can ask directly, try to understand their reasons and encourage them to seek professional support
- offer to work together to find information and appropriate services, such as headspace, and offer to go with them.

My young person doesn't want support

Sometimes young people might say there isn't anything wrong and/or refuse help (either verbally or through body language). This can feel overwhelming for family or friends who are unsure what they can do. It's OK for you to reach out for professional support in your role as family.

It's OK to raise your concerns again and again. Opening up can take time so it's important to reflect and keep trying. You could also try different approaches.



Sometimes support is continuing to let a young person know you're there until they're ready to access support and that you won't give up on them.

Self-care

Caring for a loved one who is experiencing a hard time can have an impact on you. Looking after yourself is important as it leaves you better placed to provide help. Importantly, it also lets you show your young person how you manage life's ups and downs.



Getting support

For more information and resources for family and friends, or to join a group chat with other parents, visit headspace.org.au/online-and-phone-support or call 1800 650 890. You can also search for your nearest headspace centre online, or contact Parent HelpLine.

Here are some other ideas on where to access support:

- suggest other people the young person could talk to like a trusted adult, GP or online/telephone service like eheadspace
- access your own support – clinicians can work with family members to help them support their young person
- access support as a family – family therapy can sometimes feel less confronting for a young person and can reduce feelings that they are 'the problem'
- attend a group parenting education program such as Tuning into Teens.



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

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

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

 **headspace**
National Youth Mental Health Foundation



supporting a young person after a natural disaster

Everyone will experience or respond to a natural disaster differently.

The type of support young people need is different in the response phase (initial days to weeks following a natural disaster) to the recovery phase (the following months). Life changes for everyone during and after a natural disaster, even if we haven't been at the event.

Direct and indirect exposure

Direct exposure can be understood as the loss of possessions, the loss of safety or health, or the death of loved ones or animals.

Indirect exposure is commonly understood as exposure via third parties, whether through stories of family and friends affected, or by exposure to media (radio, television, newspapers and social media).

Both of these exposures can have an immediate and lasting impact on our mental health and wellbeing.

Young people are especially vulnerable to the indirect effects of natural disasters. This is due to these events sometimes being their first exposure, their developmental stage

and their increased chance of seeing lots of graphic content – especially on social media.

There is no right or wrong way to react to a traumatic event. Some people might experience sadness and seek connection to others while others might feel numb and become more disconnected. Following a natural disaster any reaction can be normal. You might notice changes to sleep, eating patterns, relationships or difficulty with routine activities like getting dressed or schooling.



These are normal reactions to not normal events.

Supporting young people during the initial response to a natural disaster

The following tips are helpful in the initial days and weeks following exposure to a natural disaster:

- Discuss the importance for young peoples' need to focus on physical and emotional safety, and be with those who are supportive of their wellbeing.
- Support young people to engage in activities that promote a sense of calm and feeling grounded (use of alcohol and other drugs can be unhelpful).
- Supporting young people to return to some routine and to get back to doing what they used to do as much as possible is helpful (e.g., playing games or sports, hobbies).
- Support connection with others, especially those that help young people feel OK.
- Include young people in the repair and recovery of their community and support them to identify ways that they can safely connect with themselves, peers, and families in ways that are meaningful and purposeful to them.
- Limit exposure to traumatic information through stories, and media (social and traditional). It can be helpful to take a break from the 24-hour news cycle.

(Hobfoll et al, 2007)¹

Encouraging a sense of hope is important in a young person's recovery



Supporting young people during the recovery phase following a natural disaster

Encourage your young person to engage in activities that promote a healthy headspace.

As much as possible, support young people to maintain regular routines and stay connected to regular activities such as sport, school, uni or TAFE, and spending time with friends.

People who experience traumatic events are often able to recover, and don't experience ongoing symptoms or difficulties, by using their own skills and the supports of family, friends and the broader community.

For some it's important to access professional support to help with these challenges.

Check out headspace's tips for a healthy headspace (headspace.org.au/tips) for more information.



Common reactions and behaviours you might notice:

- grief and loss
- difficulty concentrating or describing what happened
- anger and confusion
- sadness and emptiness
- guilt
- denial
- shock
- changes in appetite and sleep
- fear, anxiety and insecurity.

How to help your young person

- provide stability
- offer reassurance
- normalise, but don't minimise
- explain gently what happened
- use the young person's strengths and likes
- be available and encourage coping skills
- role model healthy coping skills.

For further tips go to headspace.org.au/explore-topics/supporting-a-young-person/7-ways-to-support-a-healthy-headspace

Reaction of family and friends

Most people recover well from the emotional effects of natural disasters. Family and friends can have an important role in the healing process for young people. It's important to remember family and friends have their own challenges to cope with, and you may find yourself juggling your own reactions to the disaster with your responsibilities for the young person.

Reactions may include:

- guilt about not being able to shield your young person from the effects of the disaster
- fear and anxiety about the continuing safety of your young person
- negativity about the world in general, which you may not be able to conceal from your young person
- impatience and frustration about your young person making a slow recovery.

Look after yourself

Be kind to yourself and engage in self-care activities like sleeping well, connecting with others and staying active. These activities can be hard to do when facing stressful situations but try to do something small for yourself. It's also good for your young person to see these things modelled by others.



Getting support

It can be hard to know when it's time to seek professional support. Often, it's when someone experiences difficulties for longer than a couple of months after an event, and it's having an impact on the way they want to live their lives.

Seek immediate help if you think the young person is at risk, for example of self harm. Call your local hospital, emergency services (000), Lifeline (13 11 14) or Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800).

1. Hobfall et al. Five essential elements of immediate and mid-term mass trauma intervention: Empirical evidence. 2007; 70(4):283-315 (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/5668133_Five_Essential_Elements_of_Immediate_and_Mid-Term_Mass_Trauma_Intervention_Empirical_Evidence)



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

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

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

 **headspace**
National Youth Mental Health Foundation



maintaining a healthy headspace during the bushfire season - supporting your young person

Supporting your young person

The timing and duration of bushfire danger seasons vary across different regions in Australia. While the threat of bushfires can directly affect people living in high-risk areas, it's also normal to have reactions if you live further away and are indirectly affected (e.g., by media exposure or hearing from others).

Taking positive action and anticipating your own and your young person's emotional reactions during the bushfire season can be helpful for your wellbeing during and after this time.

Looking after yourself

Although you might feel like looking after yourself is not a priority, it is important to practise self-care. It can improve your ability to care for your young person going through a tough time. Talking to a trusted other, such as a family member, friend, Elder, or counsellor about any concerns and feelings you are having can be helpful.



Modelling self-care and help-seeking behaviours can be particularly important during the bushfire season, because your young person might look to you and be encouraged to also practise self-care.



Tips to support your young person's healthy headspace during the bushfire season

The following principles of Psychological First Aid (PFA) can help to guide you in supporting your young person at all times during the bushfire season:



Listen and look

- listen to questions and concerns
- be patient and understanding
- look at your young person's behaviour.



Protect

- focus on the steps needed to maintain your and your person's physical and emotional safety, or to return to safety as soon as possible
- resources such as the Red Cross RediPlan can help you stay focused and prioritise actions
- keep your young person informed of next steps.



Connect

- support your young person to feel connected to information, familiar people and places
- if you get separated during an emergency, reunite as soon as possible.

Tips to support your young person

Listen to your young person

During bushfire response and recovery, young people's experiences can be overlooked. Listening to young people is important because it helps them feel understood and can make them feel more in control. It can also help them to process their thoughts and feelings. Providing young people with reassurance and emotional support can help them feel more secure. Remember that you don't have to have all the answers. If you're unsure about how to answer a question, work with your young person to find out together.

Get informed

To prepare for an emergency, discuss ways of how you and your young person could work together. This may help your young person feel proactive and more in control. This could include the steps to take in an emergency (e.g., what to take with them when evacuation is required; where to meet in case you get separated).

It's important to keep informed about bushfire developments. This includes monitoring official warnings. It's also important to calmly communicate accurate information with your young person. At the same time, be aware that constant exposure to bushfire-focused news can increase negative feelings. You and your young person may want to discuss ways to help them and your household access media safely (e.g., set limits for media use, manage automatic app alerts, or unfollow content or pages).

Connect with others

Keeping in contact with friends, family, and neighbours, especially during days with high risks for bushfires can help people feel more grounded. It can also help you and your young person draw on your strengths by getting connected with people who are reassuring and comforting.

Talk about your young person's role in supporting others

You may also notice young people feel responsible for caring for other family members or friends. For instance, those young people who have younger siblings might feel responsible for the wellbeing of their siblings. Remember to regularly check in with all of your young people about their worries. Make sure to talk to your young people about whether they feel supported enough.

Practise calming techniques

In times of heightened stress, practising calming techniques can help with feeling grounded (e.g., taking slow and gentle breaths). You might want to encourage your young person to access apps or websites that help with feeling calm and maybe even practise the calming exercises together. Note that the use of alcohol and other drugs can be counterproductive.

Get into a routine as soon as you can

When the danger has subsided, returning to old routines or establishing new routines is helpful. For your young person, this can include going back to school, uni, TAFE, or their job, engaging in hobbies, and seeing friends. Encourage them to be involved in the activities that give them a sense of purpose.

Getting support

It's normal for you or your young person to experience a variety of reactions to the bushfire season. This doesn't mean either of you will have ongoing problems. If you or your young person are noticing a significant impact on your emotions, your daily activities or you're not finding any improvement, it's important to get professional help.



Make sure to talk to your young people about whether they feel supported enough.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE 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.

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

 **headspace**
National Youth Mental Health Foundation

sign up for Partners in Parenting, our online parenting program

Partners in Parenting is an evidence-based online program designed to help build your skills and confidence in supporting your high school-aged young person's mental health and wellbeing.



The program also covers general parenting challenges, such as communication, managing strong emotions, boundaries, conflicts and staying involved in your high school-aged young person's life while they navigate their independence.



There are 10 interactive online modules to explore and you can complete them in any order and at your own time and pace. Each one will only take around 15 to 25 minutes.

Setting up a free online headspace account is quick, easy and has loads of benefits.

Sign up today!

You can access Partners in Parenting via your headspace online account. If you don't have a headspace account yet, you'll first need to create one. Once you have an account, you can access the program via 'Your interactive tools'.



Visit headspace.org.au/online-and-phone-support/partners-in-parenting/ to find out more and sign up today.

A collaboration between:



MONASH
University



headspace
National Youth Mental Health Foundation



Partners in Parenting