



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.

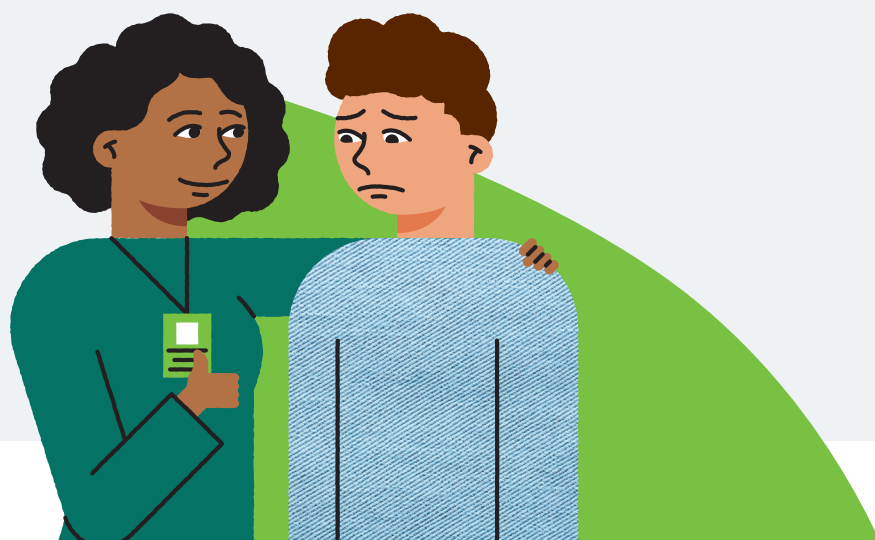
Signs to look out for

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.

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



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](#)

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

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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