headspace
National Youth Mental Health Foundation

welcome to headspace

we're here for family of young people

welcome to headspace

headspace is the National Youth Mental Health Foundation providing early intervention mental health services to young people aged 12-25. Each year, headspace helps thousands of young people access vital support through our headspace services in communities across Australia, our online and phone counselling services, our vocational services, and our presence in schools.

You play an important role in supporting your young person's mental health and wellbeing. This pack will introduce you to our services, how you can be involved, and where you can find further information and support for you and your young person.

We know that talking about mental health looks different in different communities and cultures. We're here to support you in a way that feels respectful and right for you and your young person.

What we mean by 'family'

At headspace, family is defined by each young person. For us, family means those who play a significant part in a young person's circle of care. We acknowledge and respect the diversity of families across Australia.

Family can include:

- parents
- stepparents
- foster carers
- grandparents
- siblings
- extended family
- chosen family
- partners
- Elders
- Aunties and Uncles
- Community members
- spiritual leaders
- mentors

Need information in another language?

Let us know if you'd like an interpreter.

Some key headspace factsheets are translated in different languages:

- 'about headspace' – who we are and the services we offer
- 'tips for a healthy headspace' – ways to look after your mental health and wellbeing

Find them here: **headspace.org.au/explore-topics/for-young-people/multilingual-factsheets**

headspace is a family inclusive service

how headspace can help

At headspace, we offer support to young people in four key, overlapping areas:

Good mental health is a state of wellbeing where you feel able to work and study, feel connected to others, be involved in activities in your community and 'bounce back' when life's changes and challenges come along.

Mental health

We can help young people if they're:

- feeling down, stressed or worried
- experiencing relationship problems or difficulties with family or friends
- wanting to talk through particular challenges they are facing
- just not feeling like themselves, or they're concerned about changes in their thoughts, feelings or behaviour

Physical and sexual health

Many headspace centres have youth-friendly doctors and nurses who can assist young people with:

- physical health issues
- contraception and sexual health advice

If the nearest headspace centre doesn't have a doctor or nurse, they can still recommend a youth-friendly doctor in your area.

Work and study

We can help young people if they want support to:

- Identify their strengths, and learn about themselves and what career they could pursue
- Find a job by writing resumes, cover letters and preparing for job interviews
- Plan further education, course selection and enrolment
- Balance their mental health and wellbeing with work and study

Alcohol and other drugs

If a young person's use of alcohol or other drugs is affecting their wellbeing and/or they are having a hard time stopping or cutting back, we can support them to:

- develop a plan to tackle their challenges
- connect with professional supports, including GPs and counsellors
- build on their strengths and move towards achieving their goals

Do you or your young person need urgent help?

We are not an emergency service.

If someone is hurt, you are worried about someone's safety, or you need immediate assistance please call 000 (Ambulance, Police, Fire Brigade) or go to your closest emergency department.

If someone you know is having thoughts about suicide, thoughts or urges to self-harm, or self-harming behaviour, contact the following National 24/7 crisis services:

Lifeline:
13 11 14 or lifeline.org.au

Suicide Call Back Service:
1300 659 467 or suicidecallbackservice.org.au

YOUTH beyondblue:
1300 224 636 or beyondblue.org.au

Kids Helpline: 1800 551 800

If you are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander:

13YARN:
Phone 139276, or go to 13yarn.org.au

how can we get the help we need at headspace?

If your young person is aged between 12 and 25 and is in need of support, headspace is here to help.

We offer a wide range of services for you and your young person. These can be accessed in one of two ways (or, depending on the service, both ways at the same time):

At your local headspace centre

headspace centres provide in-person information and support to young people aged 12–25 for anything affecting their health and wellbeing. Family will often be included in their care (for more information, see page 12 below).

Information and support is also available for family.

Many headspace services offer group programs for young people and family.

All headspace services are provided by qualified professionals who work together to give young people the help they need. Ask your centre if you want to know more about who is on their team, and the range of services they provide.

Opening hours vary from centre to centre. To find out more, or to make an appointment on behalf of a young person, please call, email or drop into your local headspace centre.

Find your nearest centre (and its address, programs and opening hours) by visiting our website at **headspace.org.au**

Via our online services

headspace online services for you and/or your young person include:

- online and phone counselling and support for young people and for family
- information for family about mental health and wellbeing, and ways to support a young person going through a difficult time
- information about other services that might be helpful to you and your young person
- work and study support for young people, including career mentoring
- opportunities to connect and hear from other people who might be going through similar situations to you

You and your young person can each create a headspace account to access all our online resources, at headspace.org.au

headspace online services can be available at times when your local headspace centre is closed, or if you don't have a centre within reach.

For more information about **our online supports and resources** for family, visit us at **headspace.org.au/family**

For more information about **our range of services, both online and in centres**, visit **headspace.org.au/services**

Youth Reference Groups

Each headspace centre has a Youth Reference Group (YRG) made up of young people aged 12 to 25 who meet regularly to provide ideas and feedback on how the centre runs its services. Young people can join the YRG to help improve services and gain valuable advocacy experience. These are volunteer roles. Speak to a headspace worker for more information.

See page 13 for information about Family Reference Groups and other ways family can contribute to the work of headspace.

Visit our website at any time for:

information about mental health and wellbeing, for young people, their family and communities

- information about services
- direct online and phone support
- opportunities to connect with others who may be experiencing similar challenges to you.

Find us at **headspace.org.au**

Our translated resources can be found here: **headspace.org.au/explore-topics/for-young-people/multicultural-factsheets**

Can I access headspace on behalf of my young person?

If your young person is not ready to access our services themselves, we encourage you to make contact with us to discuss what might help them to take that step. We can also look at how you can be supported to care for them.

You can contact us online, by phone, or in-person at the centre.

If your young person is already accessing or willing to access headspace services, ask us about how you can be included. (see page 15 for more information).

consent and confidentiality

Consent

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

Common law in Australia assumes people aged 18 and over are competent to make decisions about their health treatment, even if their decision is not seen to be in their best interests.

People aged between 16 and 18 are usually presumed to have capacity to make decisions about their health care, depending on the nature of the treatment and the ability of the young person to understand the treatment.

For young people under 16 years old, a parent or legal guardian is the appropriate person to give consent to access our service. Some young people under 16, however, can be assessed as having capacity to consent to treatment.

If you have questions about consent, please speak to a headspace worker at your centre, as legislation varies between states and territories.

Where the young person is able consent to treatment at headspace, regardless of their age, we will work with them to involve family in ways the young person is comfortable with, and that are likely to be beneficial to their wellbeing.

Confidentiality and information sharing

Best practice is to respect the young person's confidentiality as well as involving family meaningfully.

The things a young person discusses with a headspace worker can only be shared with someone else when the young person gives permission, **unless** there are significant concerns about someone's safety (the young person, family or the community). In these cases, where safe to do so, we will make every effort to inform the young person and/or family about the need to share information. We will provide only necessary information, and only to the appropriate services or support people.

If you have any questions at all about confidentiality, information sharing, and who can access information provided by, or about, your young person, please speak to a headspace worker.

"Being involved in the professional care of my son allowed me to have a better understanding of the support he was receiving, what my role was and how we could work together in his best interests. My son found it difficult to open up to clinicians therefore my involvement in the sessions and plans for supporting him, with his permission, allowed him to trust that he was going to get the help he needed"

Kim, family member

what to expect when your young person visits a headspace centre

At the first visit

The first time your young person visits headspace, they will:

1. Be greeted by a headspace team member
2. Fill in a registration form
3. Complete a brief online survey
4. Be given an opportunity to:
   - share what's been impacting their wellbeing
   - talk about what they might want to work on by coming to headspace

If your young person feels comfortable, family members are welcome to attend (see page 12 for more information).

How long will an appointment take?

Appointments usually take around 45-50 minutes. Sessions with a doctor might be shorter. You and your young person can confirm the length of their appointment when booking.

How much will an appointment cost?

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

If the young person has a Medicare Card, it would be helpful for them to bring it to their appointment or be able to provide their Medicare number. If they don't have a Medicare number, speak to a member of the team.

After the first visit

If your young person chooses to continue at headspace, we might work together on goals they've identified as important to them, and plan the next steps. These may include:

- Seeing a doctor and/or mental health nurse for physical or mental health difficulties
- Study or vocational assistance with a work and study specialist
- Sexual health information and support
- Assistance from an Alcohol and other drug support worker
- Referral to other agencies best suited to you and your family's needs. If your young person needs a referral from a doctor, we can arrange this
- Mental health support, such as supportive counselling, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), problem solving and group therapy

We take confidentiality, privacy and safety seriously. Read more about confidentiality and our duty of care on page 8.

how you can support your young person while they are waiting for an appointment

Here are some ideas for how you can support your young person.

These ideas can be useful at any time, including when your young person has made contact with headspace and is waiting for their first appointment.

- learn more about young people's mental health and wellbeing, and how family can support using the resources on the headspace website
- make yourself available for your young person, while also allowing them their own space
- take an interest in their activities, and encourage them to talk about what's happening in their life
- spend time with them; do things together that you both enjoy
- take their feelings seriously, respond with care
- provide a listening ear, don't rush to 'fix' things or find solutions
- encourage them to exercise, eat well, and have routines that help with sleep (see page 20 below)
- encourage and support their friendships and connections with their communities
- support them to participate in spiritual or cultural practices that are important to them
- give positive feedback, share what you notice about their qualities and strengths
- let them know you love them. While they might not admit it, this is likely to be very important to them

how you can be involved

Depending on the situation, family of young people might be involved at headspace in two main ways:

1. **being included in a young person's care, as part of their trusted network of support**
2. **participating in the improvement of services at headspace**

Let's look at each one in more detail.

family inclusion in the care of the young person

We know from research that including family in a young person's care can lead to better outcomes for the young person, and for their family too. How family is involved is guided by the young person's wishes, as well as factors such as their age, life experience, the service they are receiving, and their feelings about family inclusion.

We respect the choices, privacy and confidentiality of the young people using our services. Your young person's clinician can talk with you about how these are upheld when family are included in a young person's care.

> **"I was always made to feel a part of the care plan, with the clinician often seeking my input as to how best to work on different situations"**
>
> Ann, family member

Here are some of the ways family can be included:

- talking with the young person's clinician before or after a session
- attending some sessions with the young person
- contributing to the development of the young person's care plan or safety plan
- attending a group information session or peer support session for family
- having the option of checking in with the clinician if family becomes concerned about the young person's wellbeing

Ask at your centre about how you can be included in your young person's care.

family participation in the improvement of services at headspace

headspace puts the voices of young people and their family front and centre. We understand that young people and family are experts in their own lives, and have the right to be actively involved in the decisions that impact them.

Young people and their family can offer valuable ideas and insights based on their own experiences of headspace and/or the mental health system. This is what we call 'participation', and it is how we make sure the services we provide meet the needs of young people, their family and communities.

> **"I felt it was important to share my experiences caring for my daughter while she visited our local headspace centre. I was welcomed by the centre team and feel I add a perspective as a family member and a Dad. I contribute to the centre's consortium meetings, and staff keep me up to date on what's happening in the centre."**
>
> Michael, family representative

How can I participate at headspace?

Providing feedback

We value feedback from young people, their family and communities, and use it to help improve our services.

Here are some of the ways you can provide feedback about the services you and/or your young person receive at headspace:

- via the family survey automatically generated by email after a session with a clinician
- in person at our centre
- by phone
- via the headspace webpage: **headspace.org.au/contact-us**

We take feedback seriously and do our best to respond to it as soon as possible. It helps build our understanding of what we are doing well and how we can better meet the needs of young people and their family.

Become a family representative

Family representatives help improve headspace services by sharing insights and ideas from the perspective of someone who supports a young person experiencing difficulties. These are volunteer roles. The type of contribution a Family Representative makes depends on their availability and interests. Examples include:

- Providing ideas on how the physical layout and facilities of the centre could be more welcoming to the local community
- Reviewing documents such as centre brochures or policies
- Meeting with centre staff a few times a year to share ideas and hear updates on the work of the centre
- Sitting on interview panels for new staff members
- Attending meetings with other services or organisations

Some centres also have a Family Reference Group which, like the Youth Reference Group, meets regularly to provide input into how the centre is run.

If you are interested in becoming a Family Representative, speak to a headspace worker.

common myths and facts about mental health

Myth

Family can't help people experiencing mental health difficulties

Fact

Family, friends, and school, work and community networks play important roles in supporting young people experiencing challenges.

Family have a lasting connection with the young person and can offer care, understanding and practical support that make a big difference to their mental health and wellbeing.

Myth

People don't recover from mental ill-health.

Fact

Just like physical fitness, a person's mental health and wellbeing can decline and improve depending on what is going on in their life at the time, how past experiences have affected them, and other factors such as the type of care and support they receive.

Through the ups and downs, people can learn and develop new skills which can help them navigate challenges in the future.

Myth

Mental health difficulties are caused by genetics.

Fact

Our mental health and wellbeing is influenced by a range of factors. While genetics can play a role, the reasons someone might need support are often complex and varied.

The loss of a loved one, losing a job, relationship break-ups, bullying, stress from exams and family conflict are just some of the things that can affect the mental health and wellbeing of young people.

There are also many factors that promote mental health, such as strong family, Community and cultural supports, being physically active, being engaged in our communities, finding purpose through things like study or work, and access to good mental health care.

taking care of yourself

While supporting a young person experiencing mental health difficulties can be deeply rewarding, it can also have an impact on you – and it's essential to look after your own mental health and wellbeing.

By taking care of yourself, you are demonstrating healthy habits for your young person, while also strengthening your capacity to support them.

In the event of an emergency, passengers on a plane are advised to apply the oxygen mask to themselves first so that they can assist a fellow passenger.

Here are some tips for taking care of yourself:

It takes a village...

Consider the role that other trusted members of your young person's family and Community could play in supporting the young person. This can have the dual benefit of strengthening the young person's connections while also helping you feel less alone with your responsibilities.

Accept care from others

Accept acts of kindness or offers of support. A gift that gives you 'time out' or an opportunity to enjoy something you love can help you feel restored during what might be a tough time.

It's also OK to ask for help when you need it. Identify the people in your life who care about you and can offer a listening ear if you need to share your concerns.

It can be helpful to talk with others who have had similar experiences. These might be trusted family, friends or members of your Community. Some headspace services employ Family Peer Workers, who have first-hand experience of caring for a young person with mental health challenges. Ask at your centre about ways to connect with a Family Peer Worker.

If you need professional support for your own mental health, your GP would be a good place to start.

Don't let go of what grounds you

Supporting someone going through a hard time can leave you with little space for things in life that bring you joy. Although it can be hard when you're busy caring for others, make time to spend with people who share your interests, passions, family or cultural traditions and spiritual beliefs.

Making a commitment to enjoy the simple pleasures in life can sustain you day-to-day and long term.

What lifts your spirit or gives you energy? Pets, the beach, running, singing, connecting with nature, meditation.

For more information and resources, head to our website at headspace.org.au/family

Be kind to yourself

Family sometimes feel responsible for their young person's situation. If self-blame is weighing you down, try to be realistic and have compassion for yourself. Remember there are many factors that contribute to mental health.

Consider: Are your expectations of yourself too high? Imagine if a good friend of yours was in your situation. What would you say to them if they were being hard on themselves? You might encourage them and affirm their efforts. Listening to these messages for yourself can help with accepting you are doing the best you can.

Be informed

Supporting a young person can lead to worry and a huge feeling of responsibility. Learning about mental health and how to support a young person can give you more understanding, knowledge, skills and tools, and a sense of hope.

See page 20 for our seven tips for a healthy headspace.

Remember: Looking after yourself is not selfish

You might be juggling many competing needs and feel pulled in different directions. In addition to caring for a young person, you may be holding down a job, taking care of others such as children and older family members, and running a household.

People who care for others often feel they are being selfish if they attend to their own needs. But neglecting your needs can have consequences on your physical and mental health, relationships and financial situation.

further information and support

The following agencies also provide information and support to family caring for a young person:

National agencies

Agency	Contact details	About
Beyond Blue	beyondblue.org.au 1300 224 636	Supporting someone with depression or anxiety Online chat & 24/7 phone support
Black Dog Institute	blackdoginstitute.org.au	Supporting someone with depression or bipolar disorder
Carers Australia	carersaustralia.com.au	Carer counselling, advice, advocacy, education and training
Carers Gateway	1800 422 737 carergateway.gov.au/about-us/contact-us#translator-and-interpreter-services	Free services and support for carers
Embrace	embracementalhealth.org.au/index.php	culturally accessible (and translated) mental health resources, services and information
Family Drug Support	fds.org.au 1300 368 186	24 hour information on all aspects of alcohol and drug use for family
Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals	health.vic.gov.au/mental-health-services/mental-health-and-wellbeing-locals	Care and support for people aged 26 years or over and are experiencing mental health concerns
Parentline	Phone and/or webchat (contact details and opening hours are different from state to state)	Counselling, information and referral service for parents of children aged 0 to 18
QLife	qlife.org.au 1800 184 527	Supporting people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, intersex, queer or questioning (LGBTIQQ) Online chat & phone support
Reachout	reachout.com	Supporting young people with mental health difficulties
Sane Australia	sane.org 1800 18 (SANE) 7263	Helping someone experiencing a mental health crisis Online chat & phone support
13YARN	13yarn.org.au 139 276	24/7 culturally safe support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

seven ways to support a young person's healthy headspace

Just like physical fitness, mental fitness requires regular effort. This can be challenging to maintain. Family can support a young person by providing them with the tools to live their lives in a positive and meaningful way.

Good mental health supports young people to positively engage in work, study and social activities. It can help them:

- think flexibly
- problem-solve
- manage day-to-day stress
- feel connected to others
- be resilient when things go wrong.

1. get into life

Doing things that are enjoyable and provide a sense of purpose is essential to good mental health.

This includes fun activities, work or study. Encourage your young person to get involved in activities that give them a sense of accomplishment.

This can boost their confidence and provide opportunities to connect with others. As a support person, modelling 'getting into life' yourself can help make it feel more achievable for your young person.

2. learn skills for a tough time

It is important to take the time to think and talk about how to handle tough times. Encourage your young person to build a range of strategies for handling tough times and let them know these will come in handy now and in the future. Different strategies work for different people. You can model skills for getting through a tough time by talking openly about how you are handling it.

3. create connections

Relationships with friends, family (pets included) and others are essential to young peoples' mental health and wellbeing, and offer a sense of belonging.

While young people might often be focused on their friends, they still need family. Encourage your young person to have meaningful connections with friends while also finding ways to spend time with family.

If 'one-on-one' activities feel too intense, then joint activities with other friends or family members can be an enjoyable way to stay connected.

One of the most effective ways family can support young people is to model healthy habits.

It's a good idea to practise some of these tips yourself.

4. eat well

Eating well fuels the body and energy levels and can improve a person's mood, general health and wellbeing. Together with your young person, create a list of favourite nutritious meals and snacks, or invite your young person to join you at the supermarket, choose food and help cook meals.

We also need to drink plenty of water. Good hydration supports clear thinking and concentration. A good quality drink bottle might encourage your young person to keep their hydration up.

5. stay active

Staying active is critical to physical health, mental agility and mood regulation. If your young person isn't into sport or exercise then activities like dancing, yoga, walking the dog, cycling or walking to a friend's house are other ways of integrating physical activity into everyday life.

One way to encourage your young person to be active is by including some activity in your own life if you can.

6. get enough sleep

Sleep is important for a young person's wellbeing. During adolescence, the 'body clock' changes and young people are more likely to stay awake late at night and sleep into the morning.

You can help by encouraging regular 'winding down' activities before bed and supporting a regular routine in the morning.

Help your young person create a bedroom environment that is free of TV, devices and lights so that sleep will come more easily.

7. cut back on alcohol and other drugs

Family play an important role in supporting healthy decision making when it comes to alcohol and other drugs. From an early age, talk openly with your young person about alcohol and other drugs, including ways they can minimise risks.

Studies show that it's better for a young person to delay the time they start to drink alcohol for as long as possible.

The best way to send a message about alcohol is for family to model responsible drinking.

notes

headspace would like to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First People and Traditional Custodians. We value their cultures, identities, and continuing connection to country, waters, kin and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and are committed to making a positive contribution to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, by providing services that are welcoming, safe, culturally appropriate and inclusive.

headspace is committed to embracing diversity and eliminating all forms of discrimination in the provision of health services. headspace welcomes all people irrespective of ethnicity, lifestyle choice, faith, sexual orientation and gender identity.

headspace services operate across Australia, in metro, regional and rural areas, supporting young Australians and their families to be mentally healthy and engaged in their communities.

For more details about headspace visit headspace.org.au

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The headspace Content Reference Group oversees and approves this resource. Last reviewed May 2025