

Helping your child through adolescence

Young people can go through many different changes as they grow up. Raising sensitive issues and working to resolve problems that arise along the way can be challenging. It can often be hard as a parent to know the difference between normal behaviour, such as moodiness, irritability and withdrawal and an emerging mental health problem.

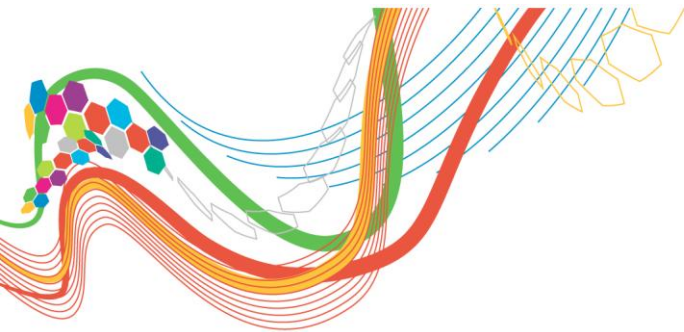
Mental health refers to a person's emotional and social wellbeing. When someone's mental health declines it can affect their feelings, thoughts and actions. This can then affect their day to day life and participation in activities such as school, work and relationships.

Mental health problems are common. Mental health problems are usually understandable reactions to personal and social issues. Mental health problems are usually not too severe or long lasting. If a young person develops a mental health problem it is important that they get help early. When mental health problems last for long periods of time and severely affect someone's everyday life, it may be that the problem is becoming an illness. Parents are vital in helping to identify when a young person might have a mental health problem and encouraging early help seeking.

Communicating with your child

Young people can go through many different changes as they grow up. Raising sensitive issues and working to resolve any problems that arise along the way can be challenging. Promoting good mental health involves keeping the communication lines open. Here are some tips that can help:

- Be available without being intrusive or 'pushy';
- Show genuine interest in what your child is doing and encourage them to talk about it;
- Make talking about your day part of the family routine;
- Help your child to find the words to express their feelings – try asking them to describe it, ask about whether the feeling is more or less intense than it has been before, ask about where and how they feel it in their body;
- Pick your time – young people tend to talk more when they are busy doing other things or don't have to look you in the eye (try driving in the car or washing dishes together);
- Let your child know that you love them. They may not always admit it, but this is likely to be very important to them.



Knowing when to get help if you are worried

Some signs that suggest a young person might be experiencing problems include:

- New, noticeable and persistent changes that last at least a few weeks;
- Obvious and persistent changes in:

Behaviour – for example, appetite, sleep, use of drugs or alcohol, avoiding school/work, poor motivation, withdrawal from people

Feelings – for example, unhappiness, depression, irritability, fear, anger, loss of pleasure

Thinking – for example, poor concentration, a drop in school performance, constant worrying, preoccupation with some thoughts, hearing or seeing things that are not there.

Helping your child to seek help

- Talk openly and honestly with your child, and let them know that you are concerned.
- Ask them what they need from you and let them know that help is available.
- Provide support through making the first appointment, providing transport, and attending the appointment (or at least walking into the waiting room), which makes it easier for the young person to engage with and accept help.

Seeking help

If you have any concerns about your child, you can contact some of the services below. Remember that it doesn't hurt to ask and these services will be happy to help you work out if you need help and how to encourage this in your child.

- **headspace** is a youth-focused mental health service for young people aged 12 to 25. For more information, see their website at headspace.org.au
- **eheadspace** provides online counseling and telephone support to young people aged 12 to 25. They can be contacted at ehheadspace.org.au and on 1800 650 890.
- Kids Helpline is a 24-hour telephone and online counseling service for young people aged 5 to 25. They can be contacted on 1800 55 1800 and at kidshelpline.com.au.
- Lifeline is a 24-hour telephone counseling service (13 11 14). www.lifeline.org.au has other online information and referral services.
- National StandBy provides bereavement support to people affected by suicide 0754424277 or standbynational@unitedsynergies.com.au
- Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467