



SAMARITANS

Young people's emotional health



**For those working with
young people aged 16–24**





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Introducing emotional health

Emotional health is about the way we think and feel, and the ability to cope with difficult things in life.

Having good emotional health is not the same thing as being happy all the time. If something happens and we feel low emotionally, getting back on track can sometimes be difficult.

Young people passing through adolescence often need particular support. During this time of their lives, young people experience huge physical, psychological and behavioural changes as they mature from children to adults. Young people are also developing greater independence and responsibilities, and experiencing changes in the way they think and feel.

Many young people have developed positive coping strategies and are generally resilient to these challenges, but some will need additional help to develop resilience and stay emotionally healthy.





Being emotionally healthy and resilient

There are many things adults can do to support young people building resilience.

These include encouraging and supporting young people to do the following:

- Build strong networks of social support
- Talk about things which worry them and to ask for help if they need it
- Recognise their strengths, to increase self-esteem and confidence
- Live a healthy lifestyle with a balanced diet, plenty of sleep and regular exercise
- Recognise the support available with things they find difficult, develop problem-solving skills and positive coping strategies
- Spend time relaxing and doing things they enjoy
- Spend time with people that make them happy.



It is important that young people know what help and support are available to them, and that support is there for them if they need it.



When to offer support

Young people face many challenges as they experience new opportunities and independence.

As their resilience is tested, young people may show some of these possible warning signs of poor emotional health:

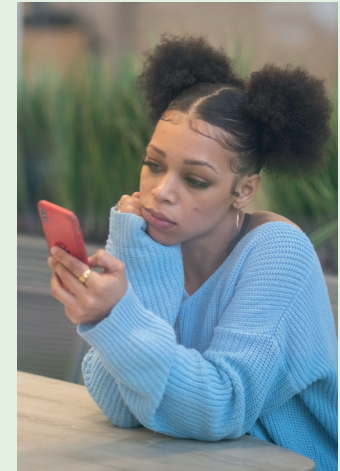
- Lacking energy or appearing particularly tired more often
- Appearing more tearful
- Not wanting to talk or be with people
- Not wanting to do things they usually enjoy
- Eating, drinking or sleeping more or less than usual
- Using alcohol or drugs to cope with their feelings
- Finding it hard to cope with everyday things
- Appearing restless and agitated
- Not liking or taking care of themselves, or feeling they don't matter.

Although warning signs may go some way to identify young people with poor emotional health, they are not always observable.

Due to personal experiences and circumstances, some young people may find it harder to cope than others.

Young people in the following groups are more vulnerable to emotional health concerns:

- Bereaved or other loss
- Young offenders or ex-prisoners
- Homeless
- Unemployed
- Looked after
- Without social networks of support
- Family history of mental illness
- Young carers.





It is important for everyone who lives or works with young people to support positive emotional health and wellbeing.

*(Collishaw S, Maughan B, Natarajan L and Pickles A (2010) Trends in adolescent emotional problems in England: a comparison of two national cohorts twenty years apart. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 51, 8, 885–894)

**Mental Health Foundation

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Depression and mental illness

Rates of mental health problems increase as children reach adolescence.

- Young people today have higher levels of anxiety, depression and behavioural issues than they did 30 years ago.
- Surveys show that around 13% of boys and 10% of girls aged 11–15 have some sort of mental health issue.*
- 1 in 4 people will experience some kind of mental health issue in the course of a year.**
- Depression is more commonly reported among young women than among young men.
- Depression in young people may begin more slowly and less noticeably than with adults.
- Particularly for young people up to 18 years, depression often involves irritability rather than sadness.
- Young people with depression may also have problems with family, friends, relationships and difficulties with academic work.





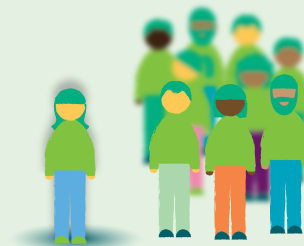
Self-harm

Self-harm is usually defined as causing injury or harm to yourself as a way of coping with painful and difficult feelings.

Someone may harm themselves because they feel overwhelmed and don't know how else to deal with these negative feelings. It's usually a very private issue and reasons and ways of self-harming will differ from one person to another. Some forms of self-harm carry a serious risk, but this doesn't mean someone who self-harms is always intending to cause themselves serious injury. Young women are more likely to self-harm than young men, with one study indicating that young women are four times more likely to self-harm than young men.



Around 1 in 10 young people will self-harm at some point, but it can happen at any age.





Young people may be more likely to harm themselves if they feel:

- That no one is listening to them
- Hopeless
- Isolated
- Out of control
- Powerless

It is important that young people receive the help and support they need. This is highlighted by the fact that:

1 in 3 people who self-harm for the first time will do it again during the following year.



3 in 100 people over 15 years old who self-harm, will take their own life. This is more than 50 times the rate for people who don't self-harm.





Suicide

Suicide is the act of a person ending their own life. Understanding the facts about suicide will help you identify the signs if a young person you are working with is finding it hard to cope.

Research shows that asking someone if they are feeling suicidal does not increase the likelihood of someone acting on their feelings and does not increase the likelihood of others feeling suicidal.

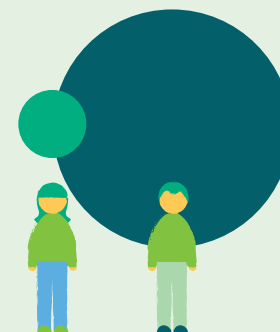
Suicide can be a difficult subject to talk about because of the stigma in society. Often, people feeling suicidal don't want to worry or burden anyone with how they feel, so they don't discuss it. By asking directly about suicide, you give them permission to tell you how they feel. People who have felt suicidal will often say what a huge relief it is to be able to talk about what they're experiencing.

Once someone starts talking they've got a better chance of discovering other options to suicide.

People who take their own lives will have often told someone that they do not feel life is worth living or that they have no future. Some may have actually said they want to die. It's extremely important to take anybody who talks about feeling suicidal seriously.

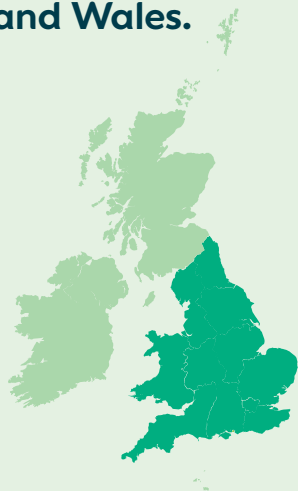


In the UK, the male suicide rate is approximately 3.5 times higher than the female rate.





Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death or young men in England and Wales.



Often, feeling actively suicidal is temporary, even if someone has been feeling low, anxious or struggling to cope for a long period of time. This is why getting the right kind of support at the right time is so important.

Young men are at a higher risk of taking their own lives than young women. Young people are more likely to take their own life if they have experienced any of these issues:

- Mental health problems
- Family or school related difficulties
- Problems in childhood or early adolescence
- History of self-harm or previous suicide attempts
- Young offender or ex-prisoner
- Survivor of abuse.

In a recent study, a link was found between the suicide of someone in a young person's peer group and their own development of suicidal thoughts or attempts.



The study of 22,000 12–17 year olds in Canada found that personally knowing someone who died by suicide was associated with suicidality outcomes (ideation and attempts) in all age groups, although the death of a schoolmate by suicide generally had a stronger effect.

The terms and phrases used when talking about suicide are important. Inappropriate or careless use of language can add to the stigma or sensationalise a death. Careful use of language can minimise negative reactions.

Phrases to avoid:

- Commit suicide
- Cry for help
- Suicide victim
- A 'successful' or 'unsuccessful/failed' suicide attempt
- Suicide 'epidemic', 'craze' or 'hot spot'

*Attempt estimates are based on hospital admissions following episodes of self-harm, reported in publicly available statistics and research studies about suicide/self-harm.



It is estimated that across England and Wales there are at least 140,000 attempted* suicides every year; that's one attempt every four minutes. About 24,000 of these cases are by young people aged between 10 and 19.



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We're
here to
listen

Call free day or night on

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Email
jo@samaritans.org

samaritans.org

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How would you spot someone who is feeling suicidal?

As well as talking about suicide, the following are possible signs:

- Being withdrawn and isolated from others
- Giving possessions away
- Wearing clothing that is not appropriate to the situation
- Asking suspicious questions
- Talking about feeling isolated and lonely
- Expressing feelings of failure or of a lack of hope
- Expressing their lack of meaning or purpose for life.

If you're concerned about suicidal thoughts, you or they can contact us anytime. We'll help you talk through your feelings, until you reach a place where you can see the options open to you so that you can find a way forward.

You don't have to give your name, and you can talk for as long as you like, about anything that is on your mind. All conversations are kept private.



How can I help?

As well as supporting young people to develop lifestyles that help to maintain positive emotional health, there may be individuals who you are worried about, perhaps because they are showing some of the warning signs listed earlier.

If you are concerned about a young person, find some time to ask them how they are and how they're feeling. If they are reluctant to talk, tell them that you are there for them if they want to talk and make sure that they have the information about where they can go for help and support.

Your role in supporting individuals may vary depending on your professional role, your relationship with the individual concerned and other support available.

However, the following is worth considering for all those who work with young people:

- Young people need to have a sense of control over what happens to them and they may be reluctant to talk about how they feel because of embarrassment, not feeling understood and feeling no one can help.
- Young people value being listened to, in private, by someone who is kind, caring, sympathetic, and who does not patronise them, but is able to give them their full attention.



Asking open questions and taking time to listen to the young person will help. Provide opportunities and support young people in communicating how they're feeling through email, text or writing it down in a diary or letter.



It is important for everyone who lives or works with young people to support positive emotional health and wellbeing.

Look after yourself

Supporting young people with emotional health difficulties can be difficult for you too.

We would encourage you to keep a colleague informed so that you can get some support yourself. Take care not to take on other people's problems as this may have a negative effect on your own emotional health. If you feel affected by the support you are providing or don't feel you can confide in a colleague, you can contact Samaritans (please see the sources of help and further information on page 16).



Chris O'Donovan Photography/Samaritans



Being there

Research shows the positive impact of one supportive adult or one adult who a child knows is thinking about them even when they are not there.

Be that supportive adult, or help to connect a young person to someone who can fulfill that role. A sense of belonging is important to our well-being. Help young people connect with each other and with your place of work.

Find ways to show young people you value them and what they say. It is ok to say you don't know what to do but that you will be there for them to support them in whatever happens.

Having a positive relationship with someone you can trust is really important to your emotional health and resilience.

If a young person tells you they are struggling with something:

- Listen and try not to voice an opinion or judge
- Reassure them that they have done the right thing by talking about this
- Remind them you're there for them and will try and help them find the support they need
- Put in place child protection procedures if necessary
- Asking for help should be seen as a sign of strength, not a weakness
- Try not to appear shocked even if this is how you feel, remain calm.



Sources of help and further information

Harmless

A self harm support organisation.

harmless.org.uk

Royal College of Psychiatrists

Leaflets containing information about mental health problems.

rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinfoforall.aspx

Young Minds

Children and young people's wellbeing and mental health.

youngminds.org.uk

Childline

Help and support for children and young people.

UK tel: 0800 11 11 (24 hours)

childline.org.uk

ROI tel: 1800 66 66 66 (24 hours)

childline.ie

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Whatever you're facing We're here to listen

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