

MENTAL HEALTH
AND EMOTIONAL
WELLBEING

Butterflies



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“What mental health needs
is more sunlight, more candor,
and more unashamed
conversation.”

-Glenn Close-



Foreword



Supporting mental health and emotional wellbeing of all young people is at the heart of the response of school leaders to the impact of COVID. We want to help secure the long term happiness and well-being of our young people in London.

The 'Butterfly Effect' is the idea that small things can have non-linear impacts on a complex system. The concept is imagined with a butterfly flapping its wings in China and, as a result, London would experience sunshine instead of rain.

As schools we are ideally placed to promote good emotional well-being and identify early behaviour changes and signs of mental distress. We have produced these mental health and emotional well-being support ideas for you to support your parents and students so we can move forward with confidence and hope.

To effectively tackle mental health and emotional well-being, a whole school approach is crucial.

The Whole School Approach means all members of the school community feel responsible and play an active role in tackling this important issue and thereby improve student learning, behaviour and well-being.

We have compiled the most useful advice from government agencies, charities to support schools and families.

Let us know how you get on...

Jacqueline Valin

CEO Southfields Academy Trust
www.southfieldsacademy.com



Julia Waters

Headteacher



“Just when the caterpillar
thought the world was ending,
she become a butterfly.”

-Unknown-





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Mental Health & Emotional Well-being - *Simple Guidance for Parents & Carers*

“There is no health without mental health; mental health is too important to be left to the professionals alone, and mental health is everyone’s business.”

-Vikram Patel-

There's no doubt about it - Physical health and mental health are two halves of the same coin - they cannot be separated. Ups and downs in physical and mental health are a normal part of life. **We all have mental health**, but there is still much **stigma** attached to talking about it.



If you broke your arm, you'd go to the doctor, right? Would you do the same if you had uncontrollable anxiety? Or felt depressed for no reason? What if your child experienced those things? Many people suffer in silence when it comes to mental health, but you can choose a different path.

**“Mental health needs a great deal of attention.
It's the final taboo and it needs to be faced and dealt with.”**

-Adam Ant-

Mental health problems affect around one in four people in the UK (with 75% starting before the age of 18.) However, just like we all catch colds from time to time, many of us experience passing mental health issues such as low-level anxiety, low-mood, and stress-related sleep problems that resolve with self-care. More serious problems range from depression and debilitating anxiety, to rarer problems such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and eating disorders. If you think your mental health needs attention beyond mere lifestyle changes, please speak to your GP.

Just like there are many things we can do to improve our physical health, we can do a lot to boost our mental health. In the pages that follow you will find practical guidance peppered with links to support services, videos, articles, webinars, and ideas to help you and your family be the best they can be - body and mind

20%

of adolescents may experience a mental health problem in any given year.

Statistics quoted from: www.mentalhealth.org.uk

70%

of children and adolescents who experience mental health problems have not had appropriate interventions at a sufficiently early age

Remember the Oxygen Rule

“When you say ‘yes’ to others make sure you are not saying ‘no’ to yourself.”

-Paulo Coelho-

If you’ve ever flown on an aeroplane you’ve heard the safety announcement: *“If there’s a drop in cabin pressure, oxygen masks will drop from above. Be sure to put your own mask on before helping your children.”* If you are concerned about your child’s well-being remember this rule! You will not have the capacity to help them if you don’t help yourself first.

What is Good Mental Health?



"You don't have to be positive all the time. It's perfectly okay to feel sad, angry, annoyed, frustrated, scared and anxious. Having feelings doesn't make you a negative person. It makes you human."

-Lori Deschene-

Good mental health is not the absence of ever feeling bad - rather it is the ability to:

- **Feel, express and manage a range of positive and negative emotions**
- **Form and maintain good relationships with others**
- **Cope with and manage change and uncertainty**
- **Learn and grow**
- **Have healthy self-esteem (not always blame yourself)**
- **Set goals and feel hopeful about your life and future**

If any of these categories made you pause, read on for tips to looking after your mental health, adapted from the [Mental Health Foundation](#).



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1

Talk About It

“Anything that’s human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary.”

-Fred Rogers-



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Talking about your feelings is not a sign of weakness - it's part of taking charge of your wellbeing and doing what you can to stay healthy. Putting feelings into words helps put things into perspective, often brings fresh insight, and makes what seems unspeakable more manageable.

Let's Talk About It



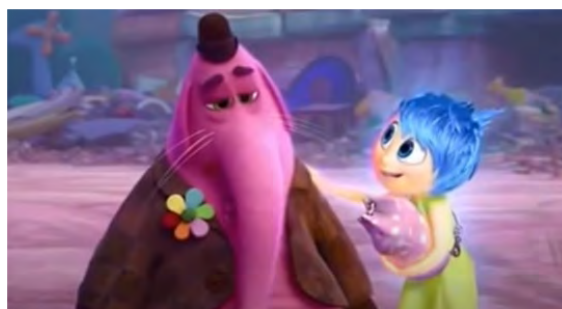
Problems carried around in your head can become a heavy burden, but sharing with someone who really listens can help you feel supported, less alone, and feel better. And it works both ways - if you are honest about your struggles, it might encourage others to do the same. There's [scientific evidence](#) to back this up!

If someone opens up to you, the key to being a good listener is not to interrupt or try to tell them that their worries are 'no big deal' - it won't help and it might make them feel dismissed. Instead [listen with empathy](#). Unless they ask, most people don't want you to solve their problems, they just want to be heard.

Too often when people ask us how we're doing we simply say, "*fine*" or "*not too bad.*" Perhaps next time you are asked, challenge yourself to pause and really consider what's going on inside, like the folks in this [video](#).



If you suspect your child is hurting, here are some [tips](#) on starting a conversation. Remind yourself that all emotions are okay - they are just messengers. If you would like to see an example of how to allow all feelings a place, even the hard ones, check out this video clip from the film 'Inside/Out': [Bingbong and Sadness](#).



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2

Keep Active

**"Making Excuses
Burns Zero
Calories Per Hour."**

-UNKNOWN-

Being inactive can keep you stuck in a bad place both physically and mentally. Moving your body, whether by doing sport, going to the gym, taking walks in the park, gardening or even doing housework, releases chemicals in your brain that make you feel good.

Regular exercise can boost your self-esteem and help you concentrate, sleep and feel better. This applies equally to kids, teens, adults and the elderly.

If you're not much of a workout person, try incorporating more movement into your day with ["exercise snacks"](#), a few simple [yoga poses](#), or a quick bounce on a [mini-trampoline](#) (a surprisingly fun and easy way to get your heart pumping. Or why not join your kids get the whole family moving with some [Joe Wicks Body Coach TV](#) workouts?



[Body Coach TV](#)

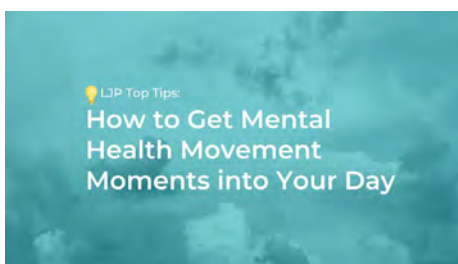
Get Active!

Get Active!



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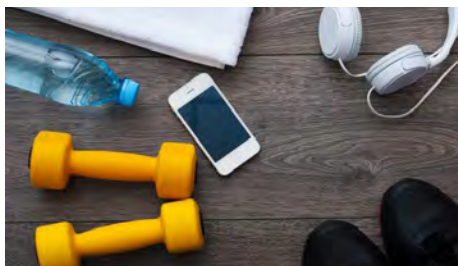
If you need some motivation, check out these resources and ideas:



"How to Get Mental Health Movement Moments into Your Day"



"5 Ways to Get Moving to Feel Better"



"11 Motivation Tricks"

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3

Eat Well

Your **diet** is a bank
account. Good **food**
choices are good
investments.

-BETHENNY FRANKEL-

We know that food impacts our physical health, but did you know that it also affects our mental health? [Food and mood](#) is a growing area of research.



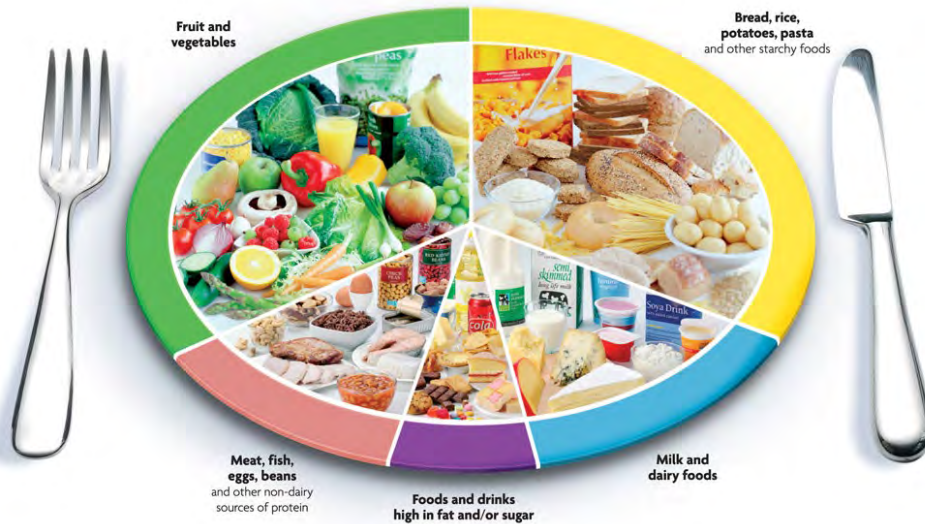
A recent [study](#) in the British Medical Journal found that healthy eating patterns, such as the [Mediterranean diet](#), are associated with better mental health than eating a “typical Western diet” that includes takeaways, deep-fried foods, lots of ‘simple’ carbohydrates (such as white breads and pastas), too much sugar, and not enough fruits and vegetables. Diet affects your blood sugar, your immunity, and the microbes in your gut which play a vital role in your mental and physical well-being. And the good news is, it’s not hard (or expensive) to make [simple changes](#) to the way you eat.



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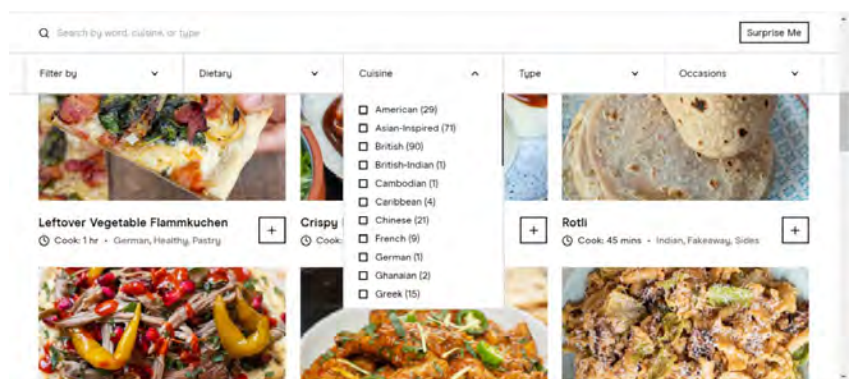
The eatwell plate

Use the eatwell plate to help you get the balance right. It shows how much of what you eat should come from each food group.



If you're trying to feed your family well on a limited budget, check out these [amazing ideas](#) from "cooking on a bootstrap" chef Jack Monroe, or visit the [MOB kitchen](#) for great recipes that feed four for less than £10.

MOB KITCHEN



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Drink Sensibly

“First you take a drink,
then the drink takes a
drink, then the drink
takes you.”

-F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby-

Did you know that alcohol is a depressant? When the drink wears off, you feel worse because of the way it affects your brain and body. You can literally [drink yourself sad](#). Thus drinking is not a good way to manage difficult feelings.



The [newest guidance](#) on drinking recommends no more than 14 units per week for both women and men. What does 14 units look like: six pints of beer or six medium glasses of wine. Not a lot!

Drinking has an even bigger impact on young people and their developing brain, and can make them four-times more likely to experience alcohol addiction later in life. Watch this [video](#) with your teenager, and remember that being a good role model is the most powerful way to teach.

8%

drank alcohol in the last week

22%

of teenagers who drank alcohol in the past week had drunk 15 units or more

Statistics quoted from: [The Health and Social Care Information Centre's 2014 report documents the drinking habits of teenagers.](#)



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“Research indicates that the average age a person first tries alcohol is now 13. Alcohol can have serious effects on developing brains and bodies, as well as leaving teenagers vulnerable to unsafe situations.”

-Drinkaware.co.uk-

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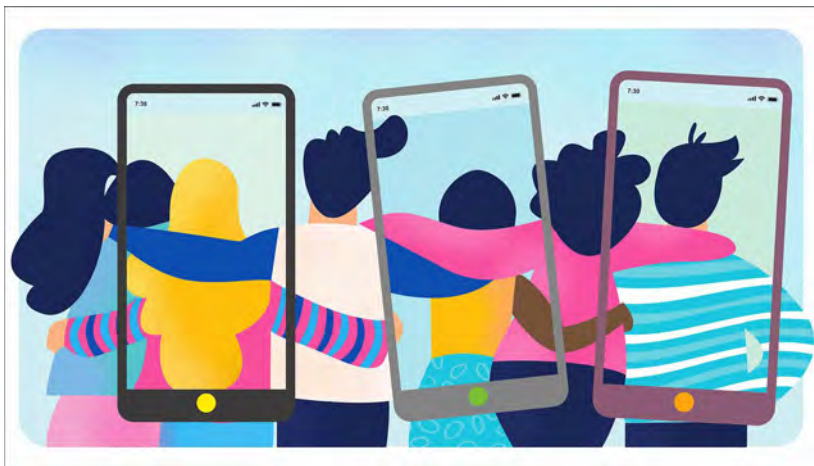
5

Stay Connected

“Life doesn’t make any sense without interdependence. We need each other, and the sooner we learn that, the better for us all.”

-Eric Erickson-

Strong family ties or supportive friendships help you feel cared for and included, and can offer different perspectives from whatever's going on inside your head. They can help keep you active, keep you grounded, and help you solve practical problems.



Make a call, connect on Facetime, set up a group Zoom chat, or take a walk with a pal. Or, if you are feeling lonely and need someone to talk to, there are many [befriending](#) organisations in the UK that can pair you with a new friend, or you can join in a group chat through mental health champion Ruby Wax's [Frazzled Cafe](#) organisation. However you do it, [stay connected](#)!



On the flip side, think carefully about being around someone who is damaging your mental health. Emotional abuse is insidious and often ignored - know the [signs](#). You don't have to put up with it.



Young people are uber-connected thanks to social media, instant messaging, and online gaming, but ironically they are [lonelier than ever](#). Research has shown that high use of the internet is linked to [loneliness, social anxiety and depression](#) *except when it's used to maintain existing relationships* and is balanced with offline interactions. In other words, it should not replace friendships “IRL”, and it’s not a great way to make meaningful new friendships. Click below for 15 things to do if you’re feeling lonely!



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Ask for Help

“Sometimes in life you can fall down holes you can’t climb out of by yourself. That’s what friends and family are for - to help. They can’t help, however, unless they know you’re down there.”

-F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby-

How willing are you to ask for help? It is a vulnerable choice, especially when you're used to "*being strong*." How do you know when it's time to ask for help?



When your inner resources are being overwhelmed you can become frozen by feelings of anxiety, have outbursts of anger and frustration, or experience periods of sadness and depression that don't let up. When that happens it's a good time to review your stress-relievers:

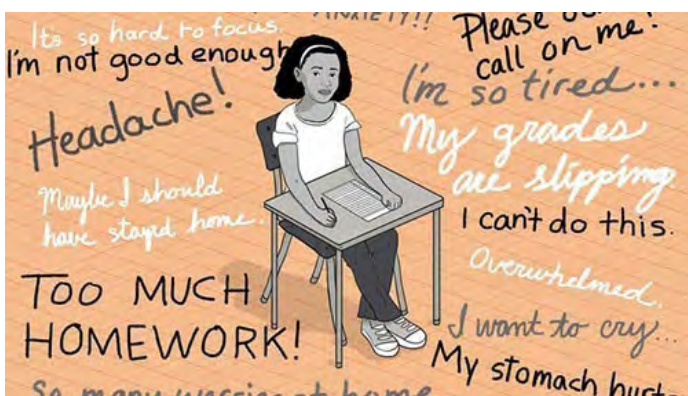
Are there things that used to help but don't any longer?
Are you experiencing a breakdown in a key relationship?
Is your health being looked after sensibly?

It helps to discern between the stressors you have some control over, and the ones you don't. None of us are superhuman. We all get tired or overwhelmed sometimes by how we feel or when things go wrong. If you can't cope, ask for help.

Did you know that over [a third of visits to GPs are about mental health](#)? Your local doctor can refer you to a counsellor, or you may prefer to seek on-line support from organisations such as [Together All](#), or get advice from [Good Thinking](#). The UK is rich with [local services](#) dedicated to helping with all sorts of problems.



There are also many resources for children and young people as well. Your GP may refer your child to the [Child and Young People Mental Health Service](#) (CYPMHS, formerly CAMHS) where they can access mental health professionals such as psychiatrists and psychologists as well as specialty services for issues such as gender identity, eating disorders, trauma and more.



Schools are another good resource as many offer counselling services and other types of support that do not require a visit with your GP. Reach out to your child's Head-of-Year, tutor to find out what their school has to offer.

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7

Take a Break

“The little things?
The little moments?
They aren’t little.”

-Jon Kabat-Zinn-

A change of pace or a short break from routine is good for your mental health. It could mean a five-minute pause from cleaning your kitchen, a half-hour lunch break at work, or a weekend exploring somewhere new.



Another way to take a break is to practice [mindfulness](#). Don't let the term 'mindfulness' put you off - at its simplest mindfulness is just a tool to make you feel better by putting distractions aside and paying attention to what is happening around and inside you.



It can involve meditation, but it doesn't have to. Here are a few mindfulness tips from the charity [Mind](#):

- **Mindful eating** - pay attention to the taste, sight and textures of what you eat. For example, when drinking a cup of tea or coffee, focus on how hot and liquid it feels on your tongue, how sweet it tastes, or watch the steam that it gives off.
- **Mindful moving, walking or running** - notice the feeling of your body moving. You might notice the breeze against your skin, the feeling of your feet or hands against different textures on the ground or nearby surfaces, and the different smells around you.
- **Body scan** - move your attention slowly through different parts of the body, starting from the top of your head moving all the way down to the end of your toes. You could focus on feelings of warmth, tension, tingling or relaxation of different parts of your body.
- **Mindful colouring and drawing** - focus on the colours and the sensation of your pencil/pen against the paper. You could use a mindfulness colouring book, doodle, or draw your own image.

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8

Do Something You're Good At

“Do anything, but let it
produce joy.”

-Walt Whitman-

Enjoying yourself helps shift your mood, beat stress, and boosts your self esteem. And what is more enjoyable than doing something you're good at? It also feels great to have an activity where you're not seen as someone's mum or dad, partner, employee, or kid. You're just you.

What are you good at? Are there activities that you used to enjoy but have given up due to the circumstances of your life? Or perhaps there's something you've always wanted to try? Consider these:

- Play a musical instrument
- Join a special interest club
- Sing in a choir
- Make art or craft
- Join a sports team
- Hone your cooking or baking skills



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9

Accept Who You
(and Your Kids) Are

“Always remember
that you are absolutely
unique. Just like
everyone else.”

-Margaret Mead-



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Everyone is a genius. But If you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree it will live its whole life thinking it's stupid." So the saying goes. And it's true. We're all different, and it's much healthier to accept our uniqueness than to wish we were more like someone else.

Parenthood is about
raising and celebrating the child
you have, not the child you
thought you'd have. It's about
understanding your child is
exactly the person they are
supposed to be. And, if you're
lucky, they might be the teacher
who turns you into the person
you're supposed to be.

— The Water Giver



Accepting your children as they are is equally important. Having unrealistic expectations, especially for those who struggle with school work or have special education needs, makes kids more prone to academic anxiety. Equally so, high-achievers, particularly young people who are perfectionists or whose parents have very high ambitions for them, often experience anxiety from fear of failure.

The pressure to do well (whether real or imagined) can affect [children's ability to sleep](#), which in turn can undermine their mental health as well as lead to [anxiety attacks](#) and [depression](#).

It's much healthier to accept that some people are academic, some are good at working with their hands, some make people laugh, some are good at maths, and some cook fantastic meals. Recognising and accepting who you are and what you're good at is the foundation of healthy self-esteem. The same goes for your kids.



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So what are you good at? Are you a fish trying to climb a tree, or do recognise that you're an excellent swimmer? Is there anything you want to change? If so, are your expectations for yourself or your children realistic? If they are, work towards change with small, manageable steps.



Here's a wonderful video clip from the film [Kung Fu Panda 3](#) on the power of using your natural talents rather than trying to be someone you're not.

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10

Care for Others

“I feel the capacity to care is the thing which gives life its deepest significance.”

-Pablo Casals-

When you care for others you shift your focus from only thinking about your own problems - it gets you out of your own head. Helping others is an important part of maintaining nourishing relationships, plus it can make you feel needed and valued, and boost your self-esteem.

Caring for a pet can improve your well-being too. The bond between you and your pet can be as strong as between people. Looking after an animal can bring structure to your day and act as a link to other people. Lots of people make friends by chatting to fellow dog walkers!



We believe there is a better way

Do IT is building a new kind of network. A network that's designed from the bottom up to put you in control. Data in your hands. For healthier futures. For Life.

A social network thats good for you. Imagine that.

Helping others also helps you see the world from another angle, something that can put your own problems in perspective. If you need ideas about how you can help care for others, consider becoming a volunteer or a befriender.

Find out more about volunteering at www.do-it.org.uk.

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11

Helping Your Children with Their Mental Health

“The way we talk to our
children becomes their
inner voice.”

-Peggy O'Mara-

As the national trend shifts away from 'stiff upper lip' to talking more freely about our feelings and problems, more and more young people are opening up about their struggles with poor mental health.



The way we approach the topic with our children makes a huge difference to their willingness to be honest about their struggles.

Although schools are making emotional well-being a top priority and have lots of resources on hand, parents can feel overwhelmed and helpless when a child is having a hard time. It can be scary to initiate a conversation with your child, and you may even have tried and failed. The biggest mistake parents make is trying to talk when either they or their child is upset. This does not work. *Why?* In the next chapter we take a look at the teenage brain.



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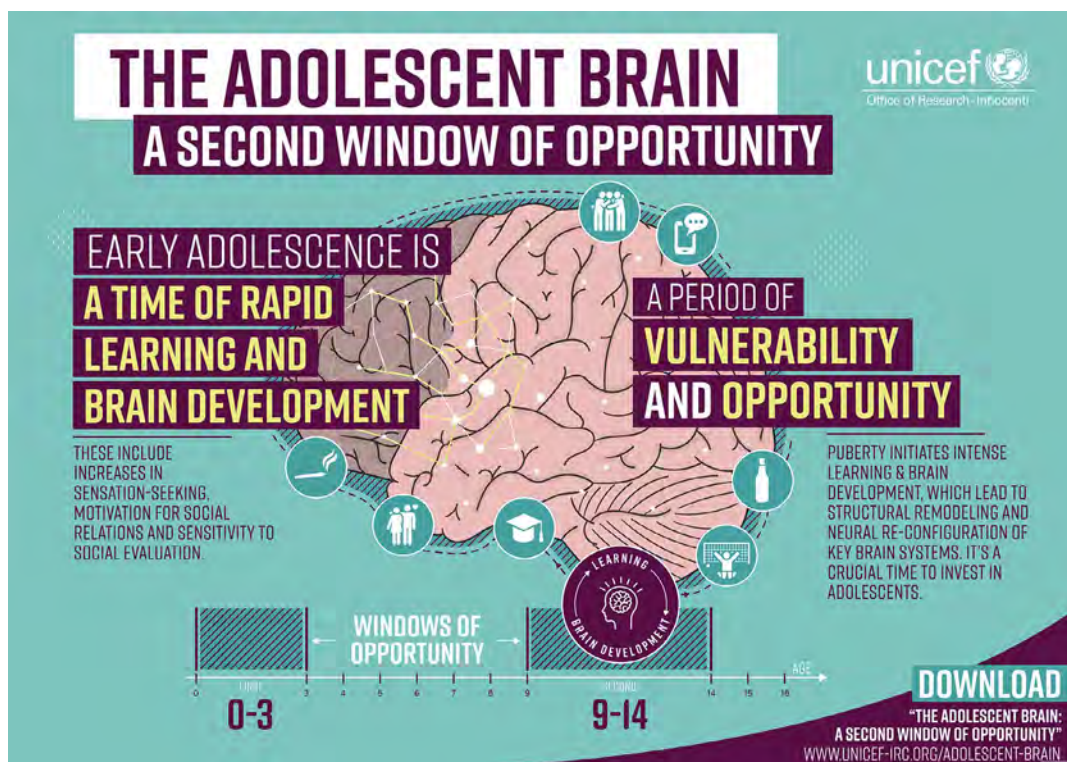
12

Understanding the Teenage Brain

*"I was a teenage boy once too,
you know." Uncle Mort said,
popping back up. "I know what
your brain looks like.
It's a three-ring circus in there."*

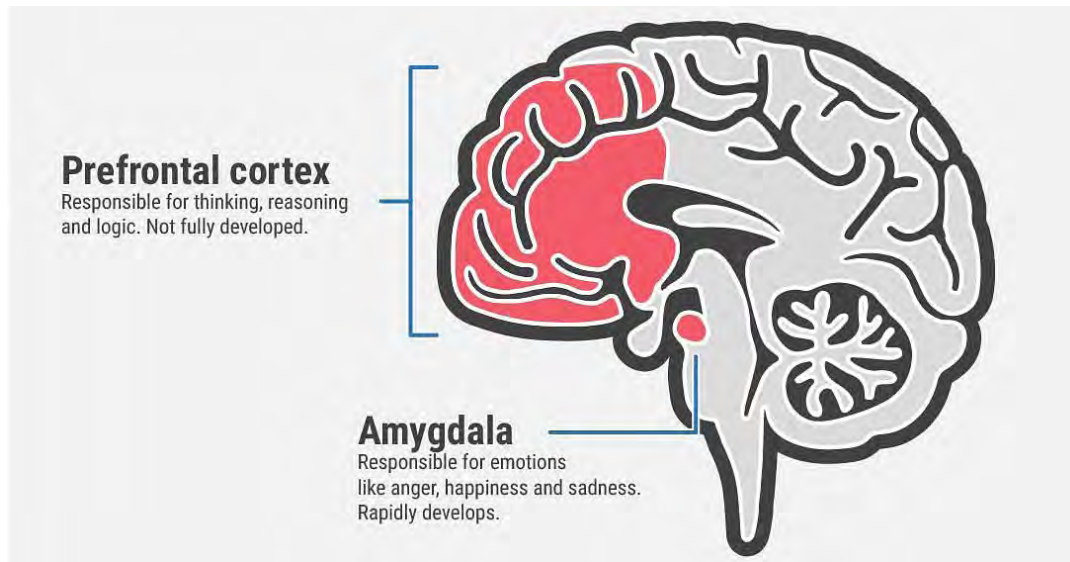
-Gina Damico-

You have surely noticed that young people in general are more emotional and reactive than adults. This is not because of hormones (although they do play a role), it is because of their brains.



In fact, the part of the brain that allows humans to control impulses and emotions is considered immature into the mid-twenties. This accounts for all sorts of risky behaviours, emotional outburst, obsessional friendships, and seemingly irrational decisions that young people make.

Why would nature play this cruel trick on parents everywhere? According to developmental neuroscientists, this is a necessary step in moving young people towards independence and away from their parents. (Learn more [here](#).) Knowing some of the mechanics of teenage brain development can help you communicate with your child in a more effective way.



Think of the human brain as having three parts:

Upstairs

The thinking brain

The Landing

The feeling brain

Downstairs

The reacting brain



Upstairs - the thinking brain

- Think before you act
- Are in control of your body and reactions
- Can see other people's point of view (empathy)
- Have self awareness
- Think before speaking
- Can focus, concentrate and work.

Downstairs - the reacting brain

- Act before you think
- Not in control of your body and reactions,
- Only see a problem from your own point of view, Lose access to self-awareness (because you are not thinking!)
- Yell, scream, cry, argue, or run away
- Feel too irritated or stressed to concentrate or work

However, when you are in your “downstairs” brain you are reacting, not thinking, and you act before you think, you are not in control of your body and reactions, you only see a problem from your own point of view, you lose access to self-awareness (because you are not thinking!), you may yell, cry, argue, fight or run away (fight/flight/freeze response), and it’s impossible to concentrate, work or learn.

We all flip between these parts of the brain occasionally, but because teenagers are waiting for their thinking brain to mature, they spend more time hanging out on the ‘landing’ - aka the emotional part of their brain. And when the emotional brain gets fired up, they ‘fall down the stairs’, lose connection to their ‘upstairs’/thinking brain and end up in their downstairs’/reacting brain. (This is sometimes called [‘flipping your lid’](#).)

When this happens remember - **they are not thinking, they are reacting!** That’s why it’s never a good idea to try and reason with them when they are upset - they won’t take on board what you are saying until they have calmed down and regained access to their thinking brain. This is true for adults as well, which is why you should not try to have rational conversations when you are upset either.



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13

Common Mental Health Problems

“Mental health problems don’t define who you are. They are something you experience. You walk in the rain and you feel the rain, but, importantly, **YOU ARE NOT THE RAIN.**”

-Matt Haig-

Mental health and emotional well-being exists on a spectrum for us all - we all have good and bad days. But sometimes bad days stretch into weeks, months or longer, and become something more.

Knowledge is power; knowing some basic facts about common mental health issues that arise in young people can make you feel more confident about helping your children when they are struggling.

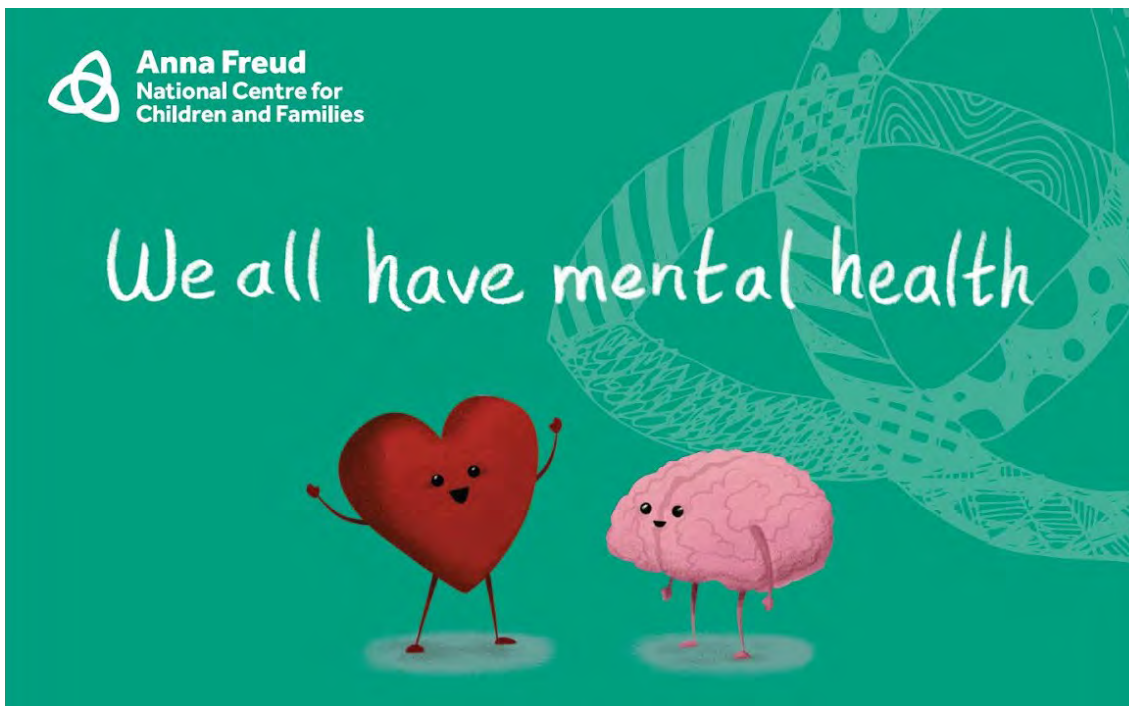


Image from Anna Freud *"We All Have Mental Health"* Video

The following chapters are problems to watch out for, along with tips and resources for supporting your children when they do.

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14

Anxiety

“Our anxiety does not come from thinking about the future, but from wanting to control it.”

-Khalil Gibran-

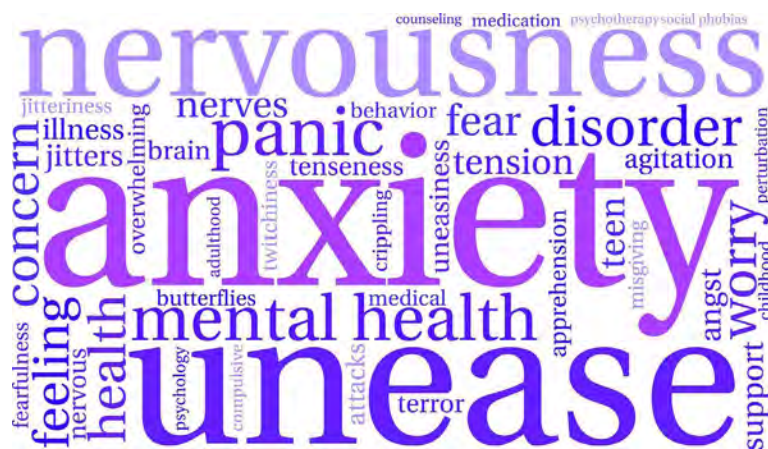
Anxiety is the most common mental health concern for children and adults. It can emerge in a number of forms including Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD), Social Anxiety Disorder, Panic Disorder, Phobias, OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder), and PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), among others. (See a full list [here](#).)



Not all children who experience anxiety have a diagnosable condition, so don't panic if your child is anxious. Sometimes parents don't realise their child is anxious as they may be quiet and compliant, thus flying under the parent/teacher radar. Other young people are clingy or quick to throw tantrums; excessively shy or worry a lot; complain of tummy or headaches; have panic attacks.

Sensitive parenting can go a long way in soothing anxious children and help them feel more confident. Here is some advice from [Relate](#):

- **Set a routine** - specific times for meals, homework, quiet time, and bedtime. A bedtime routine may include a bath, reading (alone or together), or just time to chat.
- **Reduce stress** - tension in your home can have a negative effect on your child. Set aside a little time each day to do something fun. Reduce arguments by holding family meetings.
- **Encourage independence** - it's tempting to want to do things for your child, but letting them do things by themselves is setting them up for life. Giving your child their own responsibilities in the home is a great way to help them be more independent.
- **Take risks** - Encourage your child to try some experiments such as making a phone call, talking to an unfamiliar classmate, or asking a question to a shop assistant.
- **Build self confidence** - It's important to praise your child for his or her accomplishments and for facing their fears. Involve your child in activities that help him or her feel proud such as a sport or youth club.



If you are worried about your child's anxiety, by all means speak to your GP. They may refer them for specialist help (via [CYPMHS](#)) such as [Cognitive Behavioural Therapy](#), or other talking therapies.

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Depression

“Depression is being colour blind and constantly told how colourful the world is.”

-Atticus-



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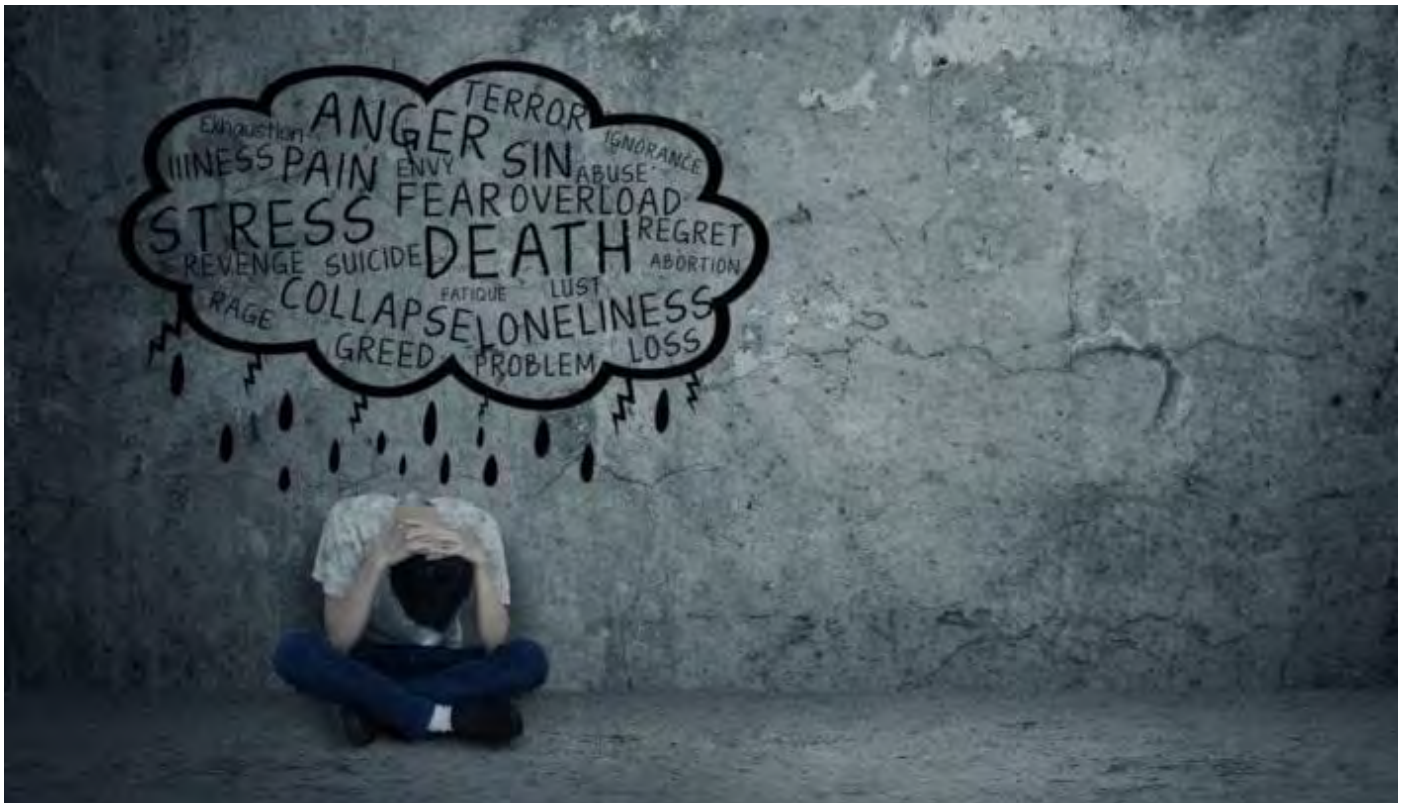
It is not uncommon for people to say, “I’m so *depressed*” in an offhand way. But true clinical depression is different from just feeling low or bad; it often comes out of the blue and just doesn’t shift (lasting for weeks, months, or longer) leaving the young person feeling hopeless and unhappy. This video explains it well.



“Being a teenager can be tough. There are changes taking place in your body and brain that can affect how you learn, think and behave. And if you are facing tough or stressful situations, it is normal to have emotional ups and downs.

But if you have been overwhelmingly sad for a long time (a few week to months) and you’re not able to concentrate or do the things you usually enjoy, you may want to talk to a trusted adult about depression.”

Quote from NIH: The National Institute of Mental Health: Teen Depression



Teenage depression signs and symptoms:

- An increase in irritability/hostility/angry outbursts
- Feeling tearful, miserable, lonely, hopeless, or numb most of the time
- Sleeping excessively or struggling to sleep - no energy either way
- Loss of motivation for school or even activities they used to enjoy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Not wanting to have discussions about their future
- Being very self-critical (or taking things personally in a negative or pessimistic way)
- Loss of interest in food or comfort eating
- Lapse in personal hygiene
- Self-harm or suicidal thoughts