



# MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS



## FACT SHEET FOR PARENTS



### WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

Life can be difficult at times for many reasons and this has always been the case. However young people today face additional challenges associated with the modern world and they may benefit from support to navigate these. Although we can look for a particular event to have effected a young person's mental health this may not always be the case. Sometimes the experience of living in our society, with all of the expectations and pressures that go hand in hand with this, can be enough to impact in a negative way upon mental health.

Often young people can feel very alone in their experiences of feeling this way. However being human means that we all at some time experience feelings of sadness, confusion, and anxiety and we can become very upset when things don't quite go to plan. Everyone faces pressure in their lives at certain times because life is a complicated, it is painful and feeling down is part of living.

Our past and our present experiences can have a big impact on how we view the world and how we react to what life throws at us. If someone or something causes us distress it is likely that in the future we will be more wary. This is our mind's way of protecting us from repeated pain and is an important survival mechanism.

We all have physical health and mental health and just like our physical health, our mental health has its ups and downs. Being mentally healthy means we are able to work through and overcome the difficulties and challenges we all face in our lives. Support from those around us is important at times like this and it may be that we as parents/carers need to start this conversation if we are becoming worried in any way.

### THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR THAT CAN IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH:

- Problems with friendships
- Signs of peer pressure / Bullying (face to face and online)
- Issues on Social media
- School and exam stress
- Changes in family circumstances (Separation, divorce, financial)
- Physical health problems (their own or someone they care about)
- Bereavement
- Current affairs/What's happening where they live and around the world
- Witnessing or experiencing a traumatic event
- Sexuality/Gender identity
- Drug/Alcohol use
- Abuse (domestic, physical, emotional, neglect, sexual)

### AS A PARENT/CARER HERE ARE SOME SIGNS TO WATCH OUT FOR:

- Sadness which is ongoing
- Loss of interest in life and any hobbies or pastimes they have enjoyed
- Tiredness and low energy levels even after a good night's sleep
- Mood swings, irritability or outbursts of anger
- Change of interest/ attitude towards school and school work
- Level of concentration is affected
- Changes in friendship group
- Distancing themselves from family
- Obsessively wanting to keep up with their peers
- Not washing or taking care of themselves
- Changes in appetite
- Being overly self-critical and constantly worried about their appearance
- Engaging in risky behaviours: excessive alcohol use, entering into a number of sexual relationships, taking drugs and taking serious risks putting themselves in danger
- Self-harm
- Suicidal thoughts which could include: Thoughts of wanting to disappear, wanting to go away, wanting to go to sleep and not be bothered if they do not wake up

Any significant changes in behaviour is telling us something – please discuss this with the young person at a time that suits them. Keep trying to have this conversation as it is important and it lets them now that you really care.

## WHAT CAN WE DO TO SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE?

- Take time to listen to them, stop what we are doing, sit and face them let them know they have our full attention
- Take seriously whatever they are telling us
- Give lots of praise and encouragement, tell them how much they are loved give lots of positive statements if they are being self-critical
- Be honest and acknowledge our own feelings, we all make mistakes especially when we are experiencing our own strong emotions.
- Saying sorry can be really important If a young person is reluctant or finds it difficult to talk, communicate on their terms. Send a text or direct message asking them how they are and telling them that you are there for them when they're ready to talk.

## WHAT CAN HELP?

We are all different. So what helps will depend on what they enjoy and what helps them to feel good. Different things work for different people. It might take time to find what works but here are some ideas that people have told us work for them.

- Spending time with people who make them feel good
- Spending less time with people who make them feel bad
- Listen to their favourite music
- Watching their favourite film
- Read something that they enjoy (that feel-good factor)
- Doing something creative (cook, make something, write)
- Exercise (at a healthy pace - going for a walk - do something where they have to move around)
- Trying something new
- Talking to someone they trust - can be difficult but talking to the right people can really help. Choosing a time and a place to talk can also be helpful.

## WHEN THEY MIGHT NEED A LITTLE BIT MORE HELP

Sometimes it helps to talk to someone outside of our family and friends. This extra help might be needed if, after a few weeks' of trying these things, the situation isn't getting any easier and the young person feels 'stuck'.

Here are some signs to watch out for. Please be aware that many of these are a normal part of growing up however, when they are ongoing and interfere with their life it might be a time to ask for help.

- Sadness
- Loss of interest in life and any hobbies or pastimes that they used to enjoy
- Tiredness and low energy levels even after a good night's sleep
- Mood swings, irritability or outbursts of anger
- Lack of interest in school and/or their schoolwork is affected
- Poor concentration
- Not seeing/contacting their friends
- Constantly comparing themselves to others
- Not taking care of themselves
- Changes in appetite
- Taking risks (alcohol, drugs, relationships, putting yourself in unsafe situations)
- Self-harm
- Suicidal thoughts (not caring about whether they live or die)

## SO WHO IS OUT THERE?

- Doctor
- A teacher or another professional that they/you trust.

Being a parent/carer can be a difficult job. If you are also struggling with some or any of the matters raised it may be that you could access support for you.

There are lots of people who can and want to help you. Here is a useful link where you can find what is available.

[WWW.WELLBEINGINFO.ORG](http://WWW.WELLBEINGINFO.ORG)

# #REASONS2

REASONS2 IS A FREE APP DESIGNED BY YOUNG PEOPLE AND WASHINGTON MIND TO HELP IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH.

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT  
[WWW.WELLBEINGINFO.ORG/REASONS2](http://WWW.WELLBEINGINFO.ORG/REASONS2)

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