# young person's mental health

a guide....

HSC Public Health Agency

Project supported by the PHA

a resource for young people, their parents and carers to support mental well-being

At times we can all struggle with life's ups and downs.

This resource has been developed to support your mental and emotional wellbeing. It provides ideas of how you can help yourself when you need that little bit of extra support.

## If things get too much for you

**ASK FOR HELP**

**TALK TO SOMEONE**

**CHECK THE RESOURCES SECTION**

# Contents include

Healthy lifestyle tips to support your well-being

Practical ways to manage your thoughts and emotions

Useful websites and apps

# Supporting our health through lifestyle choices

The World Health Organisation recognises that health is made up of physical, mental and social health and these factors are all connected. If one area of our health isn't good this will affect the other areas.

For example, when you are feeling anxious: Physically, you may experience more aches and pains, changes to your appetite or your heart may beat faster. Emotionally, you may notice changes to mood, for example you may feel sad and tearful and experience increased feelings of panic, or feel overwhelmed. Socially, you may not want to go out, interact or socialise with others and this in turn can make you feel lonely and disconnected from others.

# How you can help yourself

## Eat well, keep well

What we eat and drink each day has a big impact on our health. Be mindful of the foods and drinks you consume because what you eat and drink affects your mood, energy levels, skin and quality of sleep.

Keep a good eating routine – eat at approximately the same time every day to maintain your energy levels and mood.

Use the Eatwell Guide opposite to help you find a balance of healthier food and drinks. The guide shows how much of what you eat should come from each food group.

A healthy diet doesn't have to be boring, you can still eat a wide range of delicious food while keeping an eye on your intake of sugar, fat and salt.

# Eatwell Guide

Use the Eatwell Guide to help you get a balance of healthier and more sustainable food. It shows how much of what you eat overall should come from each food group.

Eatwell guide

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# Personal reflection

Do I eat at the same time every day?

How many caffeinated or sugary drinks am I consuming? Am I drinking too much caffeine/ sugary drinks (3-4 cups a day)?

Do I drink enough water? (6-8 glasses)

What do I notice about my eating habits?

What small changes can I make to what I eat and drink?

Am I getting enough nutrients and energy through the food I eat?

# Sleep well

Sleeping every night is an important part of life and is directly linked to your overall health and wellbeing. Your body is designed to sleep so that you can effectively cope with the rest of your day. **These Sleep Well tips aim to support practical ways for you to get a good night's sleep:**

**Avoid long naps** especially in the afternoon as this can make it difficult to get to sleep at night.

**Getting enough natural daylight and physical activity** are important for better sleep, though avoid exercise close to bedtime.

**Enjoy your caffeine before lunchtime.** Also be mindful that alcohol disrupts and impairs sleep.

Keep your bedroom **gadget free** and ensure it is **quiet, cool and dark.**

**Unwind for one hour before your bedtime.** Do something you feel relaxes you. Dim the lights and switch off screens as blue light from devices has been proven to disrupt sleep.

To help to **manage stress or anxiety, calm and clear your mind** using deep breathing or muscle relaxation techniques. Keep a notebook and pen beside your bed to write down thoughts or worries.

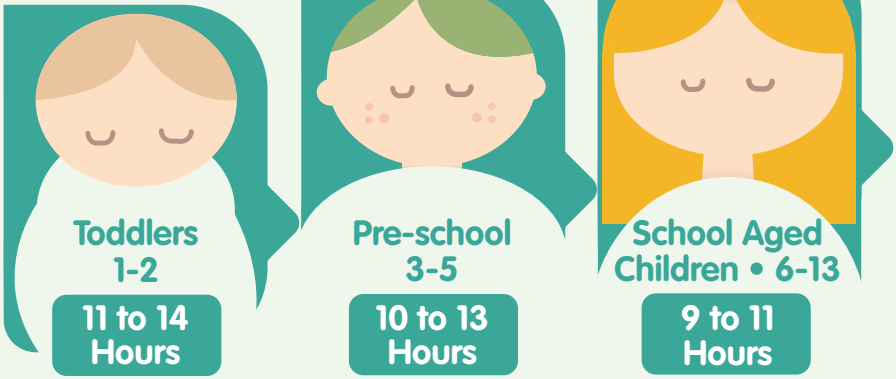
Avoid food high in sugar for a couple of hours before bedtime. Eating a heavy meal close to bedtime can impact on your ability to fall asleep and stay asleep.

Remember, having a consistent bedtime and morning routine strengthens your body clock.

If you cannot fall asleep within 20 minutes, or if you wake up and cannot get back to sleep, get up, do something that relaxes you in dim light and return to bed when you feel sleepy.

Enjoy sleeping in a comfortable, cosy and fresh bed.

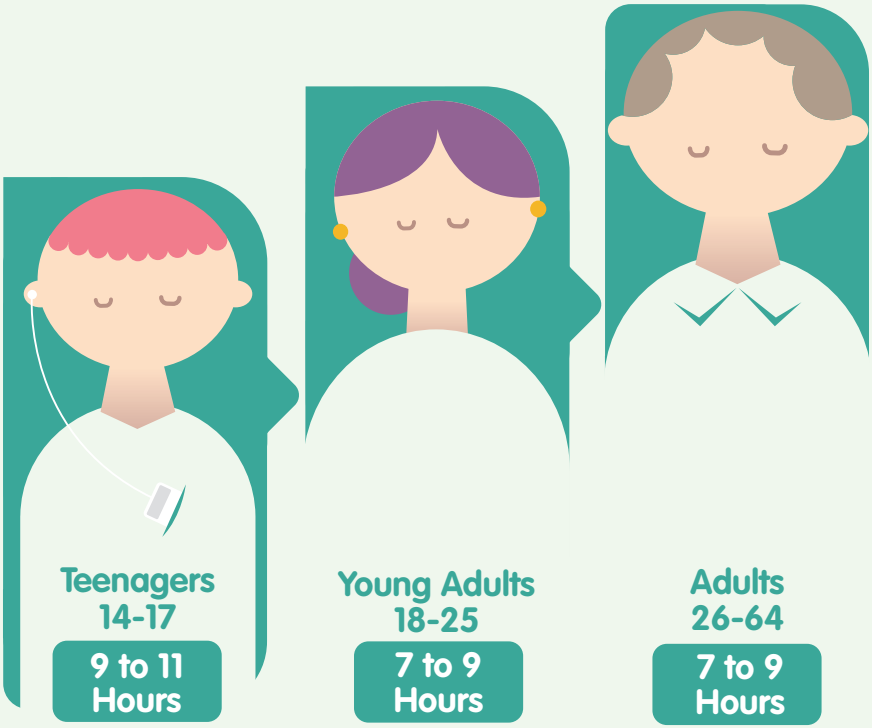
# Recommended sleep times



In order to support a good night's sleep; go to bed when you feel tired even if it is before your usual bedtime. Listen to your body's natural cues for sleep. If you ignore them and stay up later you may miss the ideal time for sleep.

If you are worried about not sleeping and sleep difficulties are affecting daily life, seek support from your GP.

**THESE TIPS DO WORK BUT MAY TAKE TIME.**



# Personal reflection

Do I have a good sleep routine?

Do I find it difficult to fall asleep or am I waking up at night?

Am I getting the right amount of sleep?

How do I feel if I have not had enough sleep?

What small changes can I make to my lifestyle to improve my sleep?

Do I wake up early or find it hard to get up in the morning?

# Self care

We all need to take good care of ourselves through practising **self care**. Self-care activities provide opportunities to help you meet your needs and feel better able to cope. We charge our mobile phones every day. Consider how often you recharge your own battery? **There are lots of ways that you can practice self care.**

**Take time to relax** and do the things you enjoy/be active, go outside into nature for a walk.

**Pay attention to your thoughts** and feelings. Be kind and supportive to yourself.

**Music** can be a constructive way to express how you are feeling. Listen to your favourite music to help you connect and feel the emotions as they arise.

When you find yourself struggling have a list of 'go to' people such as your parents or carers, friends, school counsellor, form teacher, trusted family friend or GP.

Doodle, scribble your thoughts/ideas here.

**Name it to tame it.** If possible talk about how you feel and what help you need with your family or friends. This can help you to make sense of your experience and help others to know how to best help you.

**Get creative.** Writing or drawing can help you clarify your thoughts and feelings and help you express yourself. Take notes, write or draw how you are feeling or what is going on that might be affecting you now.

**Connect with caring supportive people.** Think of these relationships as very important in your life and spend time investing in them.

Enjoy regular **mindful moments** - slow down and notice the world around you. Pause and enjoy taking 3 deep breaths.

**LIMIT YOUR SCREEN TIME.**

Doodle, scribble your thoughts/ideas here.

# Personal reflection

**What things can help me cope?**

**How do I take care of myself?**

**How did I deal with similar thoughts and feelings in the past? What and who helped?**

**What daily self-care activities do I do?**

**Where is my happy place?**

**Who are the main people who support me?**

# Be active

If you can build activity into your daily life this can have a big impact on your well-being

Get outside. Enjoy being active in nature. Go for a walk, run or cycle with a friend or family member

Discover a physical activity that you enjoy

Set achievable goals to be more active every day

Regular physical activity is associated with a greater sense of well-being and lower rates of depression and anxiety. Being more active causes chemical changes in the brain, which can help to positively change our mood

Sit less, move more often! Even small amounts of physical activity are beneficial

Join a sports club in school or in your community

Doodle, scribble your thoughts/ideas here.

# Personal reflection

How active am I each day?

What physical activities do I enjoy?

Am I doing enough exercise?

Are there ways I can help myself be more active?

Am I active outside?

Who can help me be more active?

# Thoughts, feelings & behaviours

Our thoughts have a big impact on how we feel and the way we behave. Everyone experiences feelings and emotions such as anxiety, fear, sadness or anger.

As time passes things change and how you feel will change. A feeling in this moment is not forever and there is always hope for things to be different.

Try to strike a more balanced way of thinking or looking at yourself and others without being overly judgemental or harsh by learning to reframe your thoughts.

**"If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change"**

If we can begin to catch, control and change unhelpful thoughts to more helpful thoughts this can help us feel better immediately.

This makes it easier to recognise that how we think about a problem can affect how we feel and also how we behave.

Begin to create a space to challenge some of your thoughts so you can make room for an alternative view.

**Unhelpful/unrealistic thoughts**

I always mess things up, I'm such a loser. What's wrong with me?

**Unhelpful/unrealistic thoughts**

I can't do it. I feel too anxious. Why can't I control my anxiety?

**More helpful/balanced thoughts**

Everyone makes mistakes, including me. All I can do now is apologise, try my best to fix the situation and learn from this experience.

**More helpful/balanced thoughts**

It's OK and normal to feel anxious. It's not dangerous, and it doesn't have to stop me. I can feel anxious and still do what I need to do.

# Unhelpful thinking styles

When a person experiences an unhelpful emotion e.g. anxiety, it is usually followed by a number of unhelpful self–statements and thoughts. Often there is a pattern to such thoughts and these are called "unhelpful thinking styles".

Unhelpful thinking styles can become an automatic habit. It is something that happens outside of our awareness. When someone consistently and regularly uses some of these styles of thinking, they can often cause themselves a great deal of emotional distress.

**Mental Filter** This thinking style involves a "filtering in" and "filtering out" process – a story of "tunnel vision, " focusing on only one part of a situation and ignoring the rest. Usually this means looking at the negative parts of a situation and forgetting the positive parts, and the whole picture is coloured by what may be a single negative detail.

**Jumping to conclusions** We jump to conclusions when we assume that we know what someone else is thinking **(mind reading)** and when we make predictions about what is going to happen in the future **(predicative thinking)**.



Adapted from Centre for Clinical Interventions, Australia.

**Personalisation**
This involves blaming yourself for everything that goes wrong or when you are only partly responsible or not responsible at all. You might be taking 100% responsibility for the occurrence of external events.

**Black and White Thinking**
This thinking style involves seeing only one extreme or the other. You are either wrong or right, good or bad and so on. There are no in-betweens or shades of grey.

**Catastrophising**
Catastrophising occurs when we "blow things out of proportion" and when we view the situation as terrible, awful and horrible, even though the reality is that the problem itself is quite small.

**Shoulding and Musting**
Sometimes by saying, "I should..." or I must..." you can put unreasonable demands or pressure on yourself and others. Although these statements are not always unhelpful they can sometimes create unrealistic expectations and internal pressure.

Doodle, scribble your thoughts/ideas here.

**Overgeneralisation**
When we overgeneralise, we take one instance in the past or present, and impose it on all current or future situations. If we say "You always..." or "Everyone…", or "I never..." then we are probably overgeneralising.

**Emotional reasoning**
This thinking style involves basing your view of situations or yourself on the way you are feeling. For example, the only evidence that something bad is going to happen is that you feel something bad is going to happen.

**Labelling** We label ourselves and others when we make wide ranging statements. We might use this label even though there are many more examples that aren't consistent with that label.

**Magnification and Minimisation**
In this thinking style, you magnify the positive attributes of other people and minimise your own positive attributes. It's as though you're explaining away you own positive characteristics or abilities.

Doodle, scribble your thoughts/ideas here.


Adapted from Centre for Clinical Interventions, Australia.

# Personal Reflection

Who can I talk to about my thinking patterns?

Am I able to catch control and change negative thinking patterns?

What would I say to a friend if they were thinking in a negative way?

What unhelpful thinking pattern am I most familiar with?

How might my parent, close friend or sibling view this situation?

When can I support myself to practice reframing my thoughts?

# Self harm

Self-harm is when you hurt yourself on purpose as a way of dealing with difficult feelings, painful/memories or overwhelming experiences and situations.

Often self-harm is a way of coping and is a sign that something is wrong. Sometimes hurting yourself like this feels like the only way to let those feelings out. This is not unusual behaviour but it is something which can be managed and prevented.

Some people have described self-harm as a way to:

Express something they find hard to put into words

Manage extreme emotional upset

Have a sense of being in control

Escape bad memories

Punish yourself or others for your feelings and experiences

Stop feeling numb

Receive care from others by communicating a need for support

Change emotional pain into physical pain

Reduce tension

**Why do people self-harm?** Any difficult experience can cause someone to self-harm. Common reasons include:

Pressure at school

Bullying

Bereavement

Sexual, physical or emotional abuse

Illness or health problem

Confusion about your sexuality

Breakdown of a relationship at home

Difficult feelings such as anxiety, anger, depression or numbness

An increase in stress

To identify with a peer group

Sometimes you might not know why you hurt yourself and you don't understand the reasons for your self-harm. Self-harming can become a habit that is hard to stop.

Sometimes the injuries or damage you do to yourself can be serious without you ever intending it.

**Distractions and coping skills** Distracting yourself from the urge to self-harm is a way to help stop. Different distractions work for different people and the same distraction might not always work for you every time. **It is good to have a few different distractions to choose from.**

Often self-harming brings only short-term relief. It can be upsetting when you think that self-harm is the only way you can cope, but there are other healthy ways you can cope.

You could try:

Being with your favourite people or pets

Hugging a toy or blanket

Exercise (walk or run)

Dancing, shaking or moving your body

Listening to soothing music

Spending time in nature

Having a bath/shower

Watching TV or films, particularly comedies

Get busy by cleaning and tidying up your room

Writing your feelings on paper and then tearing it up

Being quiet and still using meditation, mindfulness or breathing techniques

Reading a book

Baking or cooking

Apps like 'Calm Harm' can help you to explore alternatives to self-harm which can be effective and less harmful to practice.

If you feel a very strong urge to self-harm you can try the following harm minimisation tips:

Hit pillows or cushions

Scream/shout to vent anger and frustration

Rub ice across your skin where you might usually cut

Have a cold bath/shower

Put elastic bands on your wrists, arms or legs and flick them instead of cutting or hitting

Use a red felt tip pen to mark where you might usually cut.

**How can I get help?**
Self-harm can be dangerous and is a sign that there is an underlying problem so it's important that you recognise that you need support.

Getting help starts with talking to someone who works with these issues. You do not need to be alone.

Remember that whoever is supporting you is there to help you and listen to you. It could be a friend, parent, carer, teacher, relative, school counsellor or youth worker.

You might find it easier to talk to someone who doesn't know you. You can talk to your GP or your school nurse. There is also a list of helplines at the back of this resource. All these people are here to help you and they are completely confidential. Don't worry if you're not sure what to say, they're very experienced at supporting people just like you.

Telling a trusted adult can help to make sure you are safe and that you get medical assistance if required.

Doodle, scribble your thoughts/ideas here.

# Personal reflection

**What distractions and ways of coping work for me?**

**What support services or people are available to me?**

**Who can I talk to when I am struggling with urges to self harm?**

**What triggers the urge for me to hurt myself?**

**What helps me to feel more relaxed?**

**Do I need to seek extra support?**

# How parents and caregivers can help

**We all know the challenges family life can bring. Here are some tips that might make the job a little bit easier.**

Remember you are doing your best with your knowledge, skills and experience.

Be a great role model to children and young people as they learn from what they see and hear.

Make time to talk and listen to your child and encourage them to express their feelings.

Dine together, get rid of the gadgets from time to time; turn off the Wi-Fi.

Remember when you experience challenging times with your child never take it personally.

See your child beyond their academic abilities; they have other talents and strengths that can sometimes be overlooked.

Encourage your children not to focus on failure, instead allow them to see it as a learning opportunity.

Create ways to make memories by spending quality time together and individually.

Teach your children ways to relax as they learn to manage their different emotions.

Work on creating a loving and supportive home.

# Some extras

Communicate that you are OK for them to talk about their distress in an non-judgemental way.

Look out for a window of opportunity to check in on them without being too overbearing. Have a conversation with your child to agree the rules together so your child can understand them as a way to keep them safe and to show them that you care, for example, 'how will you keep yourself safe and how will I know?'

If you are concerned about your your child it is OK for you to contact your GP and let them know your concerns, in the case of an emergency take your child/young person straight to your local Emergency Department.

Be aware of the needs of other family members and keep connected.

# Self care for parents, caregiver

Remember it is important for you to nurture your resilience and look after your own emotional and mental wellbeing

Your inner strength will be reflected back and felt by your family. How are you feeling? Share your thoughts with your partner, close friends or another family member. Supportive relationships are important to maintain your well-being.

There are a wide range of informative apps on the market. Most are free but some you pay for.

Go to the App Store and search for the App you would like to download onto your device.

- The Worry Box
- Booster Buddy
- Mindful Gnats
- Headspace
- Mind Shift
- Calm
- Calm Harm
- Cove
- Happify
- Healios-think ninja
- Mee Two
- Mood gym
- Mood Kit
- My 3
- Safe Spot
- Sam App
- My Life
- Teens
- NOCD
- Positive Penguins
- Chill Panda

www.youngminds.org.uk

www.minded.org.uk

www.nspcc.org.uk

www.childline.org.uk

www.rethink.org.uk

www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk

www.kidscape.org.uk

www.talktofrank.com

www.hatw.co.uk

www.sleepfoundation.org

www.sleepcouncil.org.uk

# Resources for parents and carers

www.parentingni.org

www.mindingyourhead.info

www.minded.org.uk

www.nhs.uk

www.rcpsych.ac.uk

www.safehandsthinkingminds.co.uk/

www.psych.ox.ac.uk/files/research/coping-with-self-harm-brochure_final_copyright.pdf

www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/truth_about_self-harm_NEW_BRAND_0.pdf

www.sleepfoundation.org

www.mind.org.uk

www.covidwellbeingni.info

www.youngminds.org.uk/for_parents/parents_guide
www.minded.org.uk/

# If in crisis please contact

If your situation becomes more difficult or unmanageable please contact your GP in the first instance. Other sources of support include:

**ChildLine 0800 1111**
**Free 24/7 helpline or online at www.childline.org.uk**

**Lifeline 0808 808 8000**
**Free 24/7 helpline**

**Samaritans 116 123**
**Free 24/7 helpline**
**or email**
**jo@samaritans.org**

**Help lines in N.I.**
**www.helplinesni.com**

**NSPCC 0808 800 5000**
**Free 24/7 helpline**

**Parenting NI 0808 8010 722 Freephone support line**

**GP Out of Hours** (By appointment only)
**028 7186 5195**
**Mon-Fri 6pm-8.30am**
**24hr on weekends/bank holidays**

**Parentline NI**
**Freephone 0808 8020 400**
**Chat online at**
**www.ci-ni.org.uk/parentline-ni**

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