



headspace handbook



headspace fact sheets

**for you,
for friends & family**

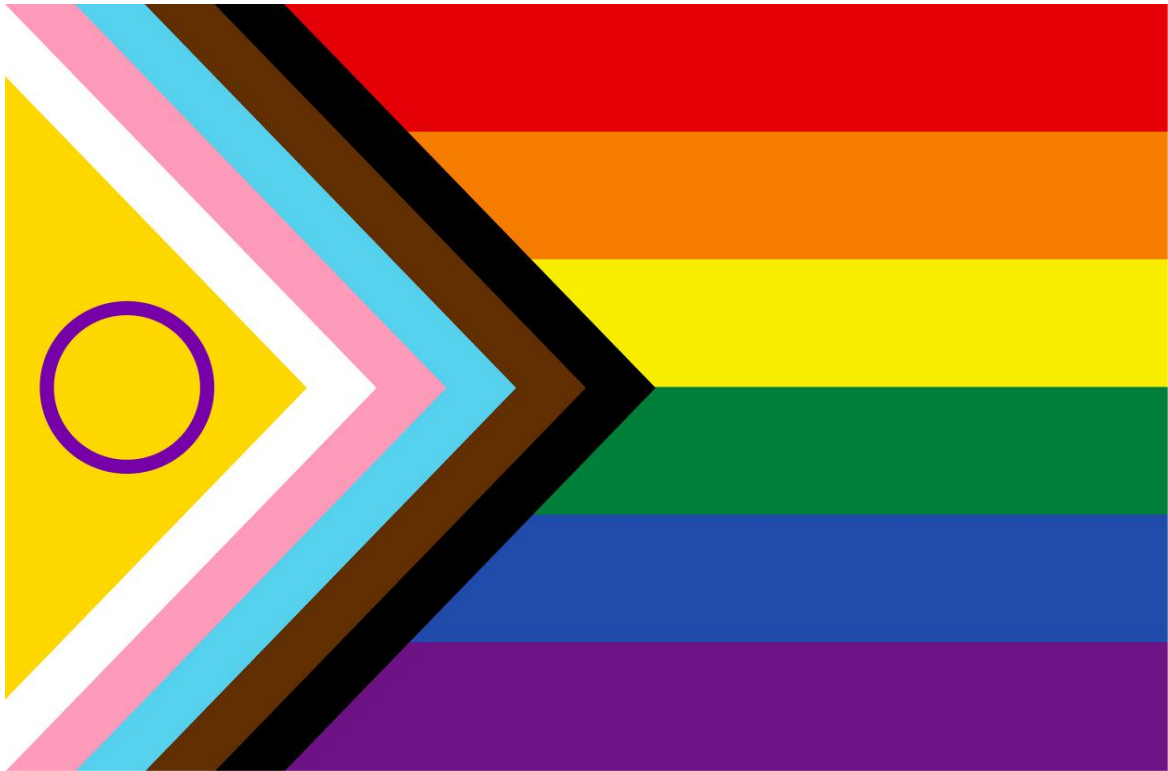


FACTSHEETS AND MORE





headspace would like to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First People and Traditional Custodians. We value their cultures, identities, and continuing connection to country, waters, kin and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and are committed to making a positive contribution to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, by providing services that are welcoming, safe, culturally appropriate and inclusive.



headspace is committed to embracing diversity and eliminating all forms of discrimination in the provision of health services. headspace welcomes all people irrespective of ethnicity, lifestyle choice, faith, sexual orientation and gender identity.

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tips for a healthy headspace

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the facts:
tips for a healthy headspace



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tips for a healthy headspace

A healthy headspace allows us to live our lives in a productive and meaningful way.



We can work, study, feel connected to others, be involved in activities in our community and bounce back when life's changes and challenges come along.



How can I boost my mental health?

There are a number of things you can do to look after and maintain your mental health and wellbeing. These include:

Stay Active

Staying active can help you sleep better, manage stress and boost your mood.

The key to getting active is finding something you like to do. Whether it's going to the gym, kicking a ball around with a friend, or going for a walk – make sure it's something you enjoy, that way you're more likely to stick with it. Start with small, manageable goals. Asking a friend to join you can help with motivation.

Create connections

Spending time with family, friends (including pets), your mob and people in your community can help strengthen your mental health and wellbeing. You can try things like:

- volunteer work
- hobbies
- clubs or committees
- sports.



Finding a safe online community can also help you feel connected and meet new people.



Get in to life

Keep doing the stuff you love to do and the things that are important to you. It can help keep the fun in your life, give you a sense of purpose, boost your confidence and help you connect with others.

Some of these things, such as skating, reading or playing the guitar, might just be for fun, but other things like work or study can give you other skills and can help to give your life meaning.

Eat well

Eating well can improve your mood, energy levels, and your health and wellbeing. Eat nutritious food (like veggies, fruit and whole grains) and drink plenty of water to give your body and brain all the power it needs to function well. Sometimes we turn to snacks that aren't nutritious when we're stressed, so it's a good idea to develop coping strategies that aren't related to food for these times (e.g., relaxation activities).

Get enough sleep

Getting good quality sleep can give you more energy, improve your concentration, and helps protect your mental health and wellbeing. But getting a good night's sleep isn't always easy – some tips:

- turn off screens at least an hour before bedtime
- try relaxation exercises
- have a bedtime routine
- avoid caffeine at least six hours before you go to bed.
- limit the use of alcohol and other drugs
- avoid napping during the day.

Keep doing the stuff you love to do and the things that are important to you.



Cut back on alcohol and other drugs

Cutting down on the amount of alcohol and other drugs that you take, or avoiding alcohol and other drugs altogether, can help you sleep better, feel better, and keep a healthy headspace.

Even though alcohol and other drugs may make you feel good in the short term, they can impact your mental health and make you feel much worse in the long run.

Getting support

There are lots of ways to look after your headspace.

Check out the headspace website for tips on how to look after your mental health.

If you've tried some of these strategies for some time without improving despite your efforts, it's time to reach out to a trusted friend, family member, teacher, Elder, counsellor or health service.

Learn skills for tough times

Taking time to think about how you handle tough times is really important. Sometimes the things we do naturally can help, and sometimes they don't.

Build your options for handling tough times, they'll come in handy now and into the future. Things like:

- using art, music or journaling to express yourself
- spending time in nature
- writing down your triggers/what you find difficult
- setting some small goals, and seeing them through
- practising being kind to yourself
- meditating or doing relaxation exercises.



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get into life

Achieving small tasks and doing things you enjoy can make you feel good. It can boost your confidence and lift your mood – helping you keep a healthy headspace.

The activities you do can have a big impact on your headspace. When you spend time doing things you enjoy (or used to enjoy), it can give you relief from tough times, and build some fun in your life. Likewise, when you set and complete small tasks (like homework, staying active or giving back to your community) it can help to create a sense of accomplishment and meaning.

How do I get into life?

Doing stuff matters. But sometimes it can also be really hard to do, especially if you're going through a difficult time. Often when we're feeling flat or sad, doing things can be the last thing we want to do. For times like this, we have some ideas below that might help.

As you set and achieve even small tasks you will learn more about yourself, build confidence and improve your wellbeing.

The key is to focus on doing – even if you don't want to or feel like it.



Doing stuff can help your headspace by:



Getting you out of a rut – if you're feeling flat.



Giving you a sense of achievement and purpose.



Building your confidence.



Lifting your energy.



Improving your motivation to achieve your goals. i.e., work, study, or staying active goals.



How can I get into life and do more?

Here are six strategies you could try.

1. Set small goals

Go for a walk or call a friend for a chat. It can be anything, the important thing is to set the goal and follow through.

2. Find activities you enjoy

If you're going through a hard time, you may not feel excited about doing anything. But think back – what did you used to enjoy? This can be a good place to start. It's a good idea to have a number of activities you can do, that way if one doesn't work out, you can try another.

3. Make a plan

When you think of an activity, make time for it. Look ahead at your week and block out some time.

4. Keep trying

Find ways to follow through with your scheduled activity, even when you don't feel like it. You may not feel like doing anything, so it might help to learn new ways to handle this. Try telling a friend what you're doing, this can help keep you on track.

5. Reflect

Once you begin achieving your goals, take some time to reflect on how it makes you feel. Did you enjoy it? Did you feel a sense of accomplishment? If you did, that's great. If not, that's OK. You could try something else.

6. Be kind to yourself

Maybe you could try a new hobby that you're not great at. Think of it as making time with yourself to learn and grow. Keep trying, be kind to yourself, and enjoy the learning journey.



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Healthy habits

When you're feeling low or stressed it's important to put healthy habits in place – to give yourself a better chance of coping with life's challenges.

Doing stuff and achieving little things every day is an important healthy habit, but it's not the only one. Things like staying active, eating well, and spending time on your relationships are also important for good mental health.

Getting support

There are lots of ways to look after your headspace.

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learn skills for tough times

Sometimes life can be hard. From relationship issues, to work and study stress, to simply feeling low – we all go through stressful and emotional periods. When this happens, our coping strategies kick in – things we've learnt over time to help us cope.

We all have different ways of coping with things. Some people use healthy ways of coping – like journaling, meditation or talking with family or friends. But for many of us, the strategies we turn to can actually leave us feeling worse. We may stop doing things we enjoy, turn to alcohol and other drugs, or disconnect from family and friends.

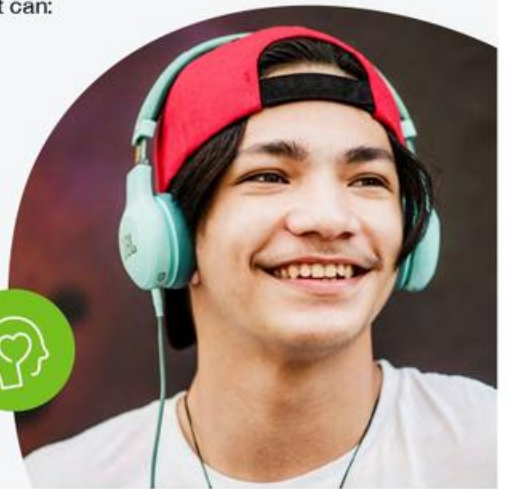
How does learning skills for tough times help?

Where should you start if you want to learn new ways to cope with tough times?

Firstly, think about how you react to stress. Take time to understand what you do and why you do it. This builds your self awareness. It can also help you learn things about yourself that can help you handle tough times in the future. The more you understand yourself, the better you will be at applying positive strategies that work for you.

Here's how learning new and positive ways to handle tough times can help your headspace. It can:

- Improve your self-awareness
- Give you a sense of achievement
- Build your confidence
- Increase your energy levels
- Boost your mood
- Improve your motivation
- Allow you to identify strategies that might not be as helpful.



Developing your own strategies that work for you can help build your resilience, your self-awareness and your confidence.

Ideas for how you can handle tough times:

- Journal – write a story or music
- Connect with country, family or friends, or your mob
- Express your feelings through artwork, song, and dance
- Write down your triggers or what you find difficult
- Schedule in regular catch ups with family and friends
- Do a digital detox or reduce screen time
- Spend time in nature – go for a swim, go fishing with friends, play sport
- Practise being kind to yourself
- Listen to things that make you feel happy, like a podcast or your favourite song
- Try meditation/relaxation exercises
- Try some breathing exercises
- Stay deadly, strong and proud of who you are!



How do I develop my own coping strategies?

Here are seven strategies you could use.

1.

Notice what you do when you are going through a tough time.

Everyone copes with tough times in different ways. Noticing how you handle tough times is the first step towards changing things that aren't working for you. Pausing for a few seconds gives you the power to choose how you'd like to act, rather than reacting without thinking.

2.

Reflect

Are your current coping strategies helpful? Thinking about this is not easy to do and can take some practice. To help, try these questions:

- Is the way I respond to tough times helpful, or not?
- How are my thoughts or feelings influencing what I do?
- Why do I respond in that way?
- How could I approach these challenges differently?

3.

Start sooner rather than later

Try to build your coping strategies as soon as you notice you're having a rocky time.

4.

Make it work for you

Your strategies might be very different to someone else, and that's OK! Everyone is different.

5.

Get support

It can help to let those closest to you know your new coping strategies. That way, when you're distressed, and if you're not thinking clearly, they can support you with your new plan.

6.

Notice the benefits

A lot of growth can come from how we manage the challenges that life throws at us. Noticing the benefits will help motivate you to continue trying new ways. Plus, it will help build your resilience!

7.

Be kind to yourself

Trying out new skills can be tough and it's normal to have ups and downs. Remember it's a process and you learn something every time you try again.

Getting support

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eat well

Food and your mood

Eating well can help give you more energy, sleep better, improve your concentration and keep a healthy headspace.

How can eating well improve our headspace?

When we think about improving our mental health, we might not think about changing the food we eat, but research tells us there's a strong link between what we eat and how we feel.

It can:



Help us get a better night's sleep



Give us more energy

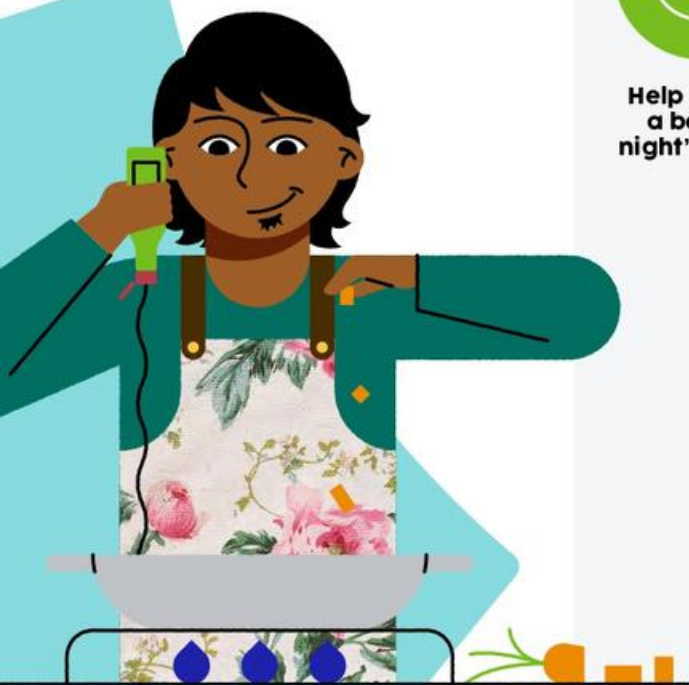


Improve our concentration - this can help with things like work and study



Make us less likely to crave foods with high levels of sugar, salt or fat.

Cooking can also help us relax, de-stress and understand more about the food we're eating.



So how can I eat well?

We know that some foods are very good for our mental health and others can cause us to feel flat or tired.



Remind yourself that eating well isn't always easy and can be full of ups and downs – be kind to yourself while you try out new things.



Eating well for your headspace includes eating a balanced, variety of foods such as:

- colourful fruits and vegetable varieties (if you struggle with some vegetables, stick to the ones you love and try to give the other vegetables a go too)
- high fibre foods (like wholegrain cereals and bread, beans, chickpeas, lentils and nuts)
- fermented foods (i.e., unsweetened yoghurt)
- omega 3 oils (i.e., olive oil, fish – tinned is fine)
- protein (a variety of protein choices are good, but try and limit red meat to max 3-4 times per week).

Eating well matters, but if you're having a tough time, this can make it harder. We know eating well can also be impacted by a lot of things like living arrangements, money and relationships.

Things that can help:

- Set yourself small goals that are easy to stick to. You could start by including fruit or yoghurt as your afternoon snack. Start small while you build your confidence.
- Sometimes how we're feeling effects what or how we eat; so it's good to develop your own coping strategies for these time that aren't related to food. Things like staying active, catching up with family or friends, or relaxation activities.
- Team up with a few friends and make batches of meals to share. This takes the pressure off making a meal everyday and will help keep costs lower.
- Buy in bulk or buy from the markets – often markets have cheaper fresh food at the end day.
- Supermarkets also reduce prices at the end of the day and have daily specials.
- Connect with your community and see if local community centres or cultural groups have cooking groups you can connect with.
- And always be kind to yourself – celebrate your wins, both big and small. They can help give you the confidence and motivation to keep going.



Healthy habits

When you're feeling low or stressed, it's important to put healthy habits in place – to give yourself a better chance of coping with life's challenges.

Eating well is an important healthy habit, but it's not the only one. Things like staying active, getting enough sleep, doing things every day and spending time on your relationships are also important for good mental health.

Getting support

There are lots of ways to look after your headspace.

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create connections

Feeling connected to others is super important.

Healthy connections are important for your mental health. Spending time with people you care about, and who care about you, can help you feel supported.

Putting time into your connections can help you feel good, boost your energy and help you keep a healthy headspace.

We know connections with others aren't always easy. Finding a new connection can often be scary. And if you're experiencing mental health difficulties you may feel like disconnecting from people, rather than reaching out.

But here's the thing – the more you work on your connections to others, the stronger they get.



How do connections boost your mental health?

When you spend time connecting with and supporting others, your wellbeing can improve too!

Strong connections can give you support when you need it and provide a sense of belonging and community.

Here's how working on your connections can improve your headspace:



Boosts your energy



Improves your sense of belonging



Helps you relax



Helps you feel supported including at workplaces, TAFE, school or uni.



How do I look after my relationships/connections?

- Every connection can bring you different benefits, so try to keep a variety of people in your life, such as friends from work or school, teachers, parents, people who have similar interests and more.
- Communication is important. When you're open with people, they're likely to be more open with you – which can help strengthen your connection.
- Socialising and keeping in contact can sometimes be hard. Occasionally you may feel left out or not all agree. Just remember, it's normal to feel this way sometimes.
- Setting safe and respectful boundaries helps you let other people know how you'd like to be treated.
- Your relationship with yourself is an important relationship too. Take time to look after yourself and recharge. When you look after yourself, it can teach you how to look after others as well.



Focus on positive connections that make you feel good about yourself. Those where you support each other and where you feel you can be yourself.

Types of connections

There are many different types of connections to explore such as:

Friends

Grow a friendship by doing something together or for them.

Family

Reach out to a family member and have a yarn or organise a family catch up.

Work mates

Share something positive with a work colleague (e.g., something you value about them or their work).

Romantic relationships

Spend time with your partner finding common interests or connecting through activities.

Cultural

Link in with local community events, cultural camps and yarnning circles.

Country

Maintain strong connections to country where you can.

Community

Get involved in your local community as a volunteer or at events.

Animals

Visit an animal park, care for a pet or spend time with your own or someone else's pet.

Support people or service

Take the first step and reach out to a support person when in need.

You (yourself)

Take time out to spend with yourself, looking after yourself by filling your own cup back up.



Getting support

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stay active

staying active is super important in keeping a healthy headspace and it can help improve our mood. It's often when we're stressed out or low that getting active can help the most.

The key to getting active is to find something you like to do. This can mean different activities to different people. It can also be a good way to connect with others who are also trying to stay active, and this can help with motivation.



How do I stay active?

Staying active is anything that gets your body moving and increases your heart rate.

Activities like walking, playing sport, yoga, dancing or swimming all help release stress and can give you a better chance of improving your mental health and wellbeing.

Getting active can improve both our physical and mental health.



There are so many benefits to staying active

It can:

- help you sleep better
- improve your concentration
- raise your energy levels
- improve your confidence
- boost your mood
- release stress
- lower anxiety.



Some tips to get started

Changing habits can be hard, remember to be kind to yourself while you're trying out new things.

Start small

Start by setting small goals; you will most likely achieve them, and this can help you to feel more motivated.

Keep track

Monitor your progress and track the benefits after you're active. Notice how this made you feel. This can help you see the connections between how moving more helps you feel better.

Do what you enjoy

Whether you enjoy working hard for short periods of time, or prefer swimming at the beach, it will be a lot easier to stick to it if you're having fun!

Make the time (even when you're busy)

When you're busy and stressed, staying active can be the first thing you stop. But prioritising physical activity can help you through the tough times.

Set a routine

Plan ahead and make staying active a part of your routine. Be organised, e.g., have your workout bag ready at the door, set reminders on your calendar or phone and setting an alarm can help you stick to your goals.



It can help to add the activity into the routine you already have (e.g., walking part or all of the way to school, TAFE, uni, or work).



Healthy habits

When you're feeling low or going through a tough time it's important to put healthy habits in place to give yourself a better chance of coping with life's challenges.

Staying active is an important healthy habit, but it's not the only one. Things like sleep, eating well, and spending time on your relationships are also important for good mental health.

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get enough sleep

Getting the right amount of quality sleep can give you more energy, improve concentration, make you less likely to crave snacks that aren't nutritious, and you guessed it, keep a healthy headspace.

If you're having a tough time, sleeping can be one of the first things that's affected.

Have you noticed when you get good quality sleep it's often easier to manage your emotions? This can help you deal with any stress, including relationships, and work and study difficulties. It can also help reduce the risk of mental health challenges in the future.

So how much is enough?

If you're aged between 12-17 then 8 to 10 hours sleep is ideal, and 18-25 year olds should try to get 7 to 9 hours. Keep in mind that different people need slightly different amounts of sleep.

You might not know how much sleep you get, so it can be a good idea to record it in a sleep app or journal and notice whether your sleep impacts things like your mood and energy levels, or anything else you might notice.



Quality sleep is like a super power!

Why it might be difficult to get a good night's sleep?

We all experience poor sleep from time to time – exams, job interviews, work stress, relationship concerns can keep us up worrying.

It's common to find it hard to get good quality sleep. It can be impacted by many things like the food you eat, using alcohol or other drugs, feeling worried or anxious, and even using your screen before bed.

The good news is there are things you can do to help you get those quality zzz's.



So how can we get better sleep?

Changing habits can be hard, be kind to yourself while you're trying new things. You don't have to do everything at once, set yourself a small goal, choose something that's easier for you to do, then add other things in later. Achieving your goals can help build your confidence.



For many people, quality sleep can be hard to get, so don't be too tough on yourself as you try different things. You'll get there... you're learning. Be kind to yourself.

- At least an hour before bed, turn off games, YouTube, social media and any notifications. Try a movie, book or watch TV instead (not in the bedroom though!).
- Use the blue light filter on your phone and lower the brightness at night.
- If you find it hard to wind down, try a mindfulness exercise; you might try a mindfulness app.
- Try to sleep the same amount every night. An extra hour, every now and then, is fine – any more can confuse your body clock. Falling asleep one hour earlier is better than sleeping in one hour later.
- If you need to get up during the night, try to avoid turning on bright lights and hop back into bed quickly.
- Avoid caffeine at least six hours before you go to bed.
- Limit the use of alcohol and other drugs.
- If you can, avoid napping during the day.
- Leave your devices outside your bedroom.



Healthy habits

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Sleeping well is an important healthy habit, but it's not the only one. Things like staying active, eating well, doing things every day and spending time on your relationships are also important for good mental health.

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cut back on alcohol and other drugs

Cutting back on alcohol and other drugs can help clear your mind, improve your energy, and boost your motivation. This can also help keep a healthy headspace.

Alcohol and other drugs can seem like a normal part of life for many people. We totally get it – it can be fun, lift your mood and boost your confidence. In the longer term though, the after-effects can leave you feeling worse than before.

Some of the unexpected results of alcohol and other drugs can be:

- changes to anxiety and thoughts
- changes to mood
- impacts on relationships
- doing stuff can feel harder.



If you're experiencing this, it's a good idea to think about whether your alcohol or other drug use is playing a part.



How does cutting back on alcohol and other drugs help?

Cutting back on alcohol and other drugs can be one of the most important things you can do for your headspace – however, it isn't always easy. It can help to think about the positives reducing your use can have.

These are things like:

- keeping your mind alert
- having more energy
- improving your sleep
- improving your relationships
- improving your engagement with work or study.

How can I reduce my alcohol and other drug use?

Start by working out how alcohol or other drugs are impacting your life.

Ask yourself

'Have I been anxious or upset more than usual? Have I been losing motivation? Could this be related to my alcohol or other drug use?'

Start slow

Set yourself a goal you think is achievable. You might want to start with a short break (try a few days, then a week, then a month).

Be patient

It might take a while before you start to see positive changes.

Stay healthy

When you cut back it's normal to feel a little off, so look after yourself – try to eat well, stay active, spend some time with people you care about and do things you enjoy.

- When an urge comes up try to sit with it. Recognise: 'OK, this usually happens before I drink or use other drugs, however this time I'm not going to act on it'. The more you do this, the easier it becomes.
- Let trusted family or friends know your plans so they can support you.
- It can be tough when your friends are using alcohol or other drugs when you're trying to cut back. Have a plan including things you could try if that situation comes up – have a non-alcoholic drink, go for a walk, don't go with them, let them know that you're cutting back.
- Don't be too hard on yourself. Whether you're cutting back or quitting, it's normal to have ups and downs. Remember it's a process and you learn something every time you try.

 If you have been using alcohol and other drugs for a period of time, or you need advice or support, it's a good idea to involve professional help such as a doctor or professional service such as headspace.



Healthy habits

When you're feeling low or stressed, it's important to put healthy habits in place – to give yourself a better chance of coping with life's challenges.

Limiting your alcohol and other drug use is an important healthy habit, but it's not the only one. Things like staying active, eating well, and spending time on your relationships are also important for good mental health.

Getting support

There are lots of ways to look after your headspace.

Check out the headspace website for tips on how to look after your mental health.

If you've tried some of these strategies for some time without improving, it's time to reach out to a trusted friend, family member, Elder, teacher, counsellor, or a health service.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au

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the facts:
tips for a healthy headspace



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leaving secondary school – navigating big changes

Leaving secondary school can feel like a big deal. Some people find it exciting and full of opportunities while others feel stressed and overwhelmed, or a combination of these things. Even changes that you're looking forward to can cause some worries. Everyone responds differently to change. Whatever your reaction is, it's OK to feel this way.



The uncertainty that big changes bring can be challenging.

What challenges and concerns might I experience?

The uncertainty that big changes bring can be challenging. Some common concerns that people experience with the change from secondary school can include:

- making friends in a new setting
- figuring out course structures or new workplace environments
- juggling commitments, such as work, family, friends and further study
- meeting different expectations and obligations (e.g., meeting deadlines)
- adapting to new living arrangements (e.g., moving out of home)
- wondering if you have made the right decisions
- managing finances and financial pressures
- experiencing new freedoms
- finding a new sense of identity and belonging
- feelings of grief or loss.

What things can help?

There are lots of things you can do to support yourself during these times. Learning some strategies can help you feel better prepared to cope with any worry or stress.

- Stress is our body's way of reacting to change, there are things you can do to help you cope. Learn about stress and your early warning signs.
- Make a list of things you can do to support yourself. Things that you enjoy and that help you de-stress.
- Notice any unhelpful thoughts. Try talking about them with someone you trust or writing them down. Talking things through can help you feel supported.
- Accept that some things won't go to plan, but can give us opportunities for growth.
- Be kind to yourself. Change and uncertainty can be hard work.

No matter what's going on in your life, it's a good idea to look after your headspace.

These are things like staying connected with family and friends, building your skills for tough times, staying active, getting enough sleep, eating well and cutting back on alcohol and other drugs. See our website for more tips (headspace.org.au/tips).



Talking things through can help you feel supported



Practical tips

Preparing for change can help it feel more manageable. These are things like:



Problem solving

Identify what's troubling you and name it. This helps you figure out what's in your control and find a possible solution. It also helps you let go of what's out of your control.



Setting achievable goals

At times, your goals can seem big and overwhelming, breaking them down into manageable chunks can help you take those first steps.



Creating a routine

Routines bring order and predictability to our lives. Remember to include activities that you enjoy.

Getting support

Big changes can be stressful and we all need support sometimes. Reach out to a trusted friend, family member, Elder, teacher, counsellor or a health service for support.

If you're aged between 15-25, headspace Work and Study can help you navigate your way through work or study and support you to transition from school to work or further study. It's free and online via webchat, video, email or phone. headspace.org.au/workandstudy



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au

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understanding your options after leaving school

It can be challenging deciding what to do next when you leave school. You've been in school for many years and now it's time to take a step into the next stage of your life.

If you left school early or didn't get the results you wanted and/or are confused about what to do next, you're not alone – these are common experiences for lots of young people.

To help you navigate your next steps, we've compiled a list of options for you to consider.

TAFE and uni – alternative pathways

The traditional pathway from school to uni is not the only way. Most TAFEs and universities offer other pathways to get into courses.

There are many options and each TAFE/uni will have different pathways, so check their websites. They will be happy to work with you to map out an ideal pathway to your dream course.

Useful website:

Course Seeker

A tool to easily search and compare thousands of courses from different institutions across Australia.

courseseeker.edu.au

Find a study
pathway that
suits your
individual needs



Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships allow you to earn money while you learn a trade and work towards an accredited qualification. They can be full-time, part-time or school-based, and are available to anyone of working age.

Apprenticeships are usually for 3-4 years.

Useful websites:

Australian Apprenticeships Pathways

A range of tools and resources to assist students researching apprenticeship and traineeship career pathways.

aapathways.com.au

Apprenticeships Support

Find out more about apprenticeships and search opportunities.

apprenticeshipsupport.com.au



Learn a trade
and gain a
qualification while
you earn money.



Traineeships

Learn and study on the job

Traineeships are usually 1-2 years and are similar to apprenticeships. However, they provide on the job training in a wide range of occupations. Organisations usually list traineeships on their careers' page or via job search platforms like SEEK.

Useful website:

SEEK
[seek.com.au](https://www.seek.com.au)



Volunteer

Build your network, gain experience

Volunteering can be a great way to gain real-world experience, meet new people and get a foot in the door. If you're curious about a particular industry or interested in an organisation, volunteering can help you build transferable skills and get industry experience.

There are many opportunities available in Australia and overseas. However, if you know an organisation you would like to volunteer for, it's worth contacting them directly and outlining your interest.

Useful websites:

SEEK Volunteer
Australia's largest source of volunteer opportunities
[volunteer.com.au](https://www.volunteer.com.au)

Australian Volunteers
Search volunteer opportunities in Australia and abroad
[australianvolunteers.com](https://www.australianvolunteers.com)

Getting support

If you're still unsure about what's next, headspace Work and Study can help – headspace.org.au/workandstudy

Our service is tailored to your needs and can support you in developing the skills and confidence to reach your work or study goals.

It's free and online – using webchat, video, email, or phone.

Take a gap year

A gap year is a year off academic study and is often taken after you finish secondary school. It's a way to think about your journey so far and what to do next – you could travel, work and/or volunteer.

It can also be a great way to try something totally different, meet new people and experience a new culture. There are organisations that can do this for you, or you can plan it yourself.

Useful website:

Year 13
Have a good list of gap year providers
year13.com.au/explore/travel



Meet new friends,
experience other
cultures, learn
new skills



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au

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getting help

1. what are mental health difficulties and when to seek help
2. helping a friends going through a tough time
3. mental health benefits of work and study



what are mental health difficulties and when to seek help

What are mental health difficulties?

You may have heard the phrase 'mental health difficulties' used before. It's helpful to think about mental health on a spectrum from mentally healthy to mental illness. Everyone sits somewhere on this spectrum, and where you are can change from day-to-day or week-to-week, depending on lots of things.

Let's explore the mental health spectrum:



Healthy

This means you feel able to work and study, feel connected to others, be involved in activities in your community and 'bounce back' when life's changes and challenges come along.

Coping

This is when people feel some pressure but are doing OK.

Difficulties

This is where people might feel like they aren't doing so well.

Mental illness

This is a broad term that refers to a group of conditions like anxiety, depression or others. These can significantly affect how a person feels, thinks, what they do and how they interact with others. Almost half the population will experience a mental illness at some point in their lives.

Understanding mental health difficulties

Everyone can experience mental health difficulties from time to time. During these times people might notice their sleep, mood, motivation or energy are not going as well as they would like.

If these experiences last a few weeks or more, and are starting to affect things like relationships, or work and study, it's a sign that you might be heading towards the difficulties area of the spectrum.

If you've noticed these sorts of changes, it's important to look after yourself, learn a bit more about what's happening for you, and get support from family and friends.



By finding the right support and strategies, things can get better.



Contributors to mental health difficulties

Things such as:

Current circumstances

- such as stress at school, uni, TAFE or work
- money problems
- difficult personal relationships
- problems within your family.

Difficult life experiences

- abuse
- neglect
- the loss of someone close to you.

Individual factors

- coping skills
- thinking styles.

Biological factors

- family history of mental health difficulties.



Looking after your mental health

There are a number of things you can do to look after and maintain your mental health and wellbeing. As a start, include the tips for a healthy headspace into your everyday routine. This will leave you more prepared to cope with the challenges you face in your everyday life.

These include:

- get into life
- create connections
- learn skills for tough times
- eat well
- stay active
- get enough sleep
- cut back on alcohol and other drugs.



How do I know if I'm experiencing a mental health difficulty?

Signs and symptoms of mental health difficulties:

- not enjoying, or not wanting to be involved in things that you would normally enjoy
- feeling sad or 'down', or crying more often
- changes in appetite, eating, or sleeping patterns
- being easily irritated or having more problems with family and friends
- finding that you aren't performing at school, TAFE, uni or work like you used to
- being involved in risky behaviour that you would usually avoid, like taking drugs or drinking too much alcohol, or depending on these substances to feel 'normal'
- having trouble concentrating or remembering things
- having negative, distressing, bizarre or unusual thoughts
- feeling unusually stressed or worried
- feeling like things have changed or aren't quite right.

Getting support

Taking that first step can be tough, but if you are experiencing mental health difficulties, it's important that you reach out to a trusted friend, family member, teacher, Elder, or counsellor to share what you are going through.

You can also get in touch with your GP, local headspace centre or use our online or phone-based service at headspace.org.au/eheadspace

If you ever feel unable to cope because of overwhelming or intense emotions, or if you have any thoughts of harming yourself, then ask for help immediately.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au

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helping a friend going through a tough time

When a friend is going through a tough time, it can be hard to know what to do or say.

You might have noticed they:

- don't seem like themselves, or
- they're acting differently.

You might:

- let them know that you care
- ask them what you can do to support them
- let them know that you're there to help them.

They might not open up at first, but showing them you have their back can give your friend strength and hope. This also lets them know you're someone they can talk to if they do decide to open up later on.

Asking your friend if they need help can be hard, especially when you don't know what kind of help you can offer. Checking in can make a big difference to the person having a tough time.



What if my friend doesn't want any help?

For many people, reaching out for support can be really difficult. Some of your friends might need time and space.

Be patient with your friend. Don't judge them or get frustrated if they don't take you up on your offer of support. Remind them that you're there if they need you and give them time.

Sometimes you might need to involve someone else – like a trusted adult. If you do decide to tell someone, try to let your friend know that you're planning on doing this first and encourage them to get involved in the conversation.



What can I say to help my friend?

It can be hard to know how to start the conversation. Sometimes it can be as simple as, 'are you doing OK? I've noticed we haven't been in contact as much recently' – or mention what you've noticed that's different.



Some things to help you plan:

- Are you in a good headspace and ready to have the chat?
- Have you had a look at the headspace website to get a better understanding of what might be going on for them?
- Have you got enough time, and are you free from distractions?
- Have you chosen somewhere private?
- Have you found a time that's good for them to chat?

If it looks like your friend would benefit from additional support, you can say things like:

- 'Have you talked to anyone else about this? It's great you've talked to me, but it might be good to get advice and support from a health worker.'
- 'It doesn't have to be super intense and you can make choices about what you want to talk about.'

- 'A GP can help you with this stuff. You can find one that bulk-bills, so you don't have to pay. I can go along with you, if you want.'
- 'There are some great websites you can check out to get more information. Have you heard of headspace or ReachOut?'
- 'Did you know that you can get free and confidential support online or over the phone from places like eheadspace, Kids Helpline and Lifeline. All of these services are anonymous and can help you figure out what's going on for you and where to go for the right support.'
- 'I know you're not feeling great now, but with the right support, you can get through this. Lots of people do.'
- 'It's OK to feel this way and I'm here and have your back.' Let your friend know you believe their concern and let them know they're not alone.

Look after yourself

Supporting a friend through a tough time can be difficult, so it's important that you take care of yourself, too. You can check out our tips for a healthy headspace to look after yourself. These include:

- get into life
- create connections
- learn skills for tough times
- eat well
- stay active
- get enough sleep
- cut back on alcohol and other drugs.



Try to remember that you're their friend and not their counsellor. Be realistic about what you can and can't do. Set boundaries for yourself to make sure that you're doing the best thing for you, your friend and the friendship.

Getting support

If you need support, it's a good idea to reach out for extra help. A good place to start is a trusted friend, family member, Elder, teacher, counsellor, or a health service.

You can also contact a headspace centre or eheadspace if you would prefer to chat to someone online or over the phone.

If you or your friend need medical help right now contact 000.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au

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mental health benefits of work and study

If you're having a tough time, getting into work and study might be the last thing on your mind, but it can really help your mental health.

Whether you're struggling to get out of bed or having a tough time in other ways, we're here for you. You don't have to wait until you feel 'ready' to get involved in work or study, we can support you wherever you're at.

Studies have shown that young people experiencing mental health difficulties can often work if they are given the support they need. And although returning to work and study may have its challenges, research suggests that it is likely to improve your progress towards good mental health and wellbeing.

There are lots of reasons why we might stop or find it hard to start working or studying, such as:

- feeling inexperienced or unprepared to enter the workforce or to go to university or TAFE
- having had a negative experience in the past
- experiencing mental health difficulties or stress in your personal life
- having other responsibilities such as caring for someone else
- having a disability or physical health concerns
- COVID-19 impacts
- being unsure of where to start or what options are available
- time off school or lack of any career advice at school.

Studies have shown that the longer you are not working or studying, the harder it can be to get back into it. Sometimes we face tough times or things happen that impact our confidence or ability to work or study. When this happens it's easy to withdraw or get stuck in a rut that feels hard to get out of.

On the other hand, working or studying can play a really positive role in our lives. It can help you feel more confident, empowered and connected. It's about building a routine, setting yourself goals and working to achieve them. Getting into work and study can be the best thing you do for your wellbeing.

Working or studying can play a really positive role in our lives. It can help you feel more confident, empowered and connected.

“Don't hesitate in waiting to be at a specific stage of readiness. The team started with me from what I felt was rock bottom for me and within 3 months I made progress I never thought I would. I went on to continue doing these things because I had a team that did and still does believe in me and what I want to do.”

Young person from headspace Work & Study Online



Here are some examples of how work and study can help you to build your confidence and even give you a boost in other areas of life.

If you're finding it hard to get into work or study remembering these things might help you stay motivated.

Keep learning new skills

Through working or studying, you can build an understanding of your strengths and values, learn skills to help you negotiate, problem solve and communicate. Work and study can also help you to develop skills that are useful in other areas of your life, such as managing stress, anxiety, and difficult situations.

Making connections

Working or studying can help you stay connected with people, places, and routines. Being connected with others can help you overcome challenges and see things from a new perspective. Getting into work or study is a great way to meet like-minded people who may even have similar interests and passions. With time, you can often build a group of people who care about you, and you will learn a lot along the way.

Build confidence and self-esteem

Through work and study, you can develop skills, practise strategies that support good mental health, and grow your confidence in new and challenging situations or environments. Learning new skills and overcoming challenges can build a sense of accomplishment as well as confidence and self-esteem in all areas of your life.

Learn how to cope through tough times

Any skill can be learned through practice, and resilience is no different. Feeling confident and knowing how to manage setbacks can have a positive impact on your mental health and wellbeing. You can build resilience by coping and learning from tough times. What you learn you can often take into other parts of your life, not just work.



Make it matter

Work and study can give us a structured and routine environment, which can really help you stay motivated and engaged, and something to feel proud of. Motivating yourself is hard! But working towards something that really matters to you can be really empowering and inspiring. We suggest taking some time to consider your values and why they matter to you – then doing the same with your company's values. A job or study environment will often feel more 'right' when these values align and it's easier to connect your purpose to your work.



Getting support

The headspace Work & Study programs are tailored to your needs and can support you in developing the skills and confidence to reach your work or study goals.

It's totally free and we have options for you to participate online via webchat, video chat or phone, as well as face to face at over 50 of our headspace centres.

“It was really helpful to have both [supports]. I started out with work and study support and when we realised I also needed other support we teamed up with mental health [support]. [We] all worked together towards my goals in study, future work, and mental health issues including anxiety and depression inside and outside of the learning/workplaces. Having both teams meant I didn't have to drop one area to focus on another and in a way where having both wasn't ever overwhelming.”

Young person from headspace Work & Study Online

For more information on mental health benefits and work and study support scan the QR code:



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au.

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navigating life

1. maintaining health gaming
2. understanding grief
3. understanding bullying
4. understanding gender identity
5. understanding sexuality and diverse sexual identity
6. understanding sex and sexual health
7. understanding sexual consent
8. understanding and maintaining healthy romantic relationships
9. dealing with relationship breakdowns
10. how to cope with the stress of a natural disaster
11. maintaining a healthy headspace during bushfire season



maintaining healthy gaming

Gaming can be a positive and enjoyable activity. It can help us connect with others, feel a sense of belonging and provide opportunities to learn new skills.

Healthy gaming can help us have structure and routine in our lives and give us some beneficial downtime, relaxation and fun.

However, for a small number of young people, gaming can have an unhealthy impact on their everyday lives.

If you think your gaming is impacting on other areas of your life, there are lots of things you can do to get some balance back.



Signs of possible issues with gaming

Gaming can be a great way to help with stress. However, we know that increased or excessive time spent gaming can take time away from being able to do the things that keep you healthy and well. For example, you might find that you're spending less time than usual with people you care about. You might be less active than usual or find that you're having trouble with sleep, studies or work.



If you're experiencing some of the changes below, it might be a sign that gaming is starting to have an impact on your everyday life.

- feeling sad, irritable, anxious, frustrated or angry when you're not able to game
- changing sleep patterns or sleep difficulties (e.g., staying up late to game)
- getting angry or experiencing conflict with others over gaming
- other people expressing concern at the amount of time you spend gaming
- spending less time with family and friends outside of gaming
- spending large amounts of time thinking about gaming
- losing track of time and a loss of control over the time you spend gaming
- feeling physical pain or irritation, for example pain in your neck, wrists, or back, dry or red eyes
- eating meals while playing or skipping meals
- spending more money than you can afford on gaming
- using gaming as a way of avoiding the real world
- often feeling frustrated at losses
- unsuccessful attempts to quit gaming or cut back.

You might also notice changes to your life that don't appear directly related to your gaming such as:



Loss of interest in activities that you previously enjoyed.
Lowered self-esteem or self confidence.



Changes to eating habits.



Headaches/migraines.
Decreased personal hygiene.



Difficulties with studies or work.



Things you can do

It can help to check-in with yourself to see how your gaming is impacting on your life. Ask yourself questions like – is it a fun activity that's helping you feel good? Does your gaming support you to have a healthy life or take away from it? How's your balance with other activities? Are you feeling more or less connected with others?

There are lots of tips that can help keep your game time in balance. Time on screens can sneak up without you realising it. Here are some things that you could consider:

Treat it as a reward

Leave your gaming time for after your activities/jobs are done.

Decide in advance how much time you want to spend.

Set a timer or an alarm to give yourself a finish time.

Set up times in your day to be screen free.

Explore other hobbies and interests

Get up and move regularly. Doing some simple stretches can really help.

Make sleep a priority

Charge your devices outside of your room or leave them outside your bedroom. You'll reduce the temptation to be online instead of sleeping.



Getting support

If you find that your gaming is impacting on your relationships, mood, studies or work, reach out to someone you trust like a friend, family member, teacher, Elder, counsellor or health service. A general practitioner (GP) is another good place to start.

With the right support, most people are able to get back to enjoying the benefits that gaming can contribute to their lives.

There are lots of ways to look after your headspace.

Check out the headspace website for tips on how to look after your mental health – headspace.org.au/tips



If you're finding it hard to make changes, reach out for some support.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au

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understanding grief

Grief is what happens when you lose someone or something important to you.

Grief is personal and everyone grieves differently. Our culture, gender, age, past experiences of loss, and belief systems can shape the way we grieve.

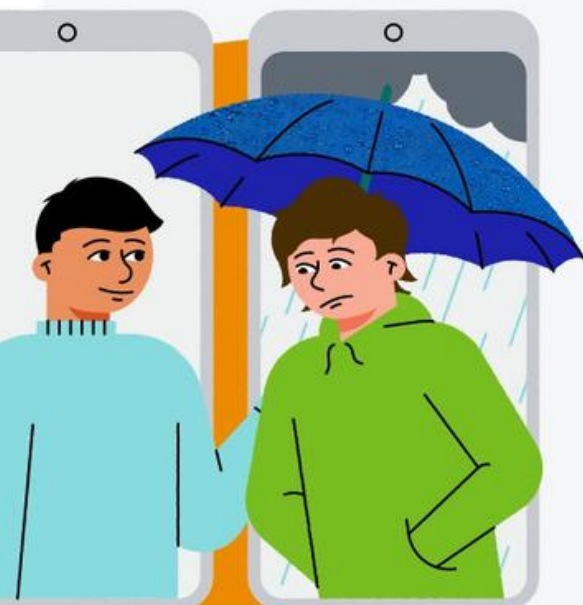


It's normal to feel a range of emotions after you experience loss, but that doesn't make it easy.



What is grief?

Grief is a normal and natural response to loss and it can affect many parts of our lives.



Changes to feelings

You might feel some or all of these things:

- shock
- disbelief
- pain
- sadness
- longing
- anger
- resentment
- regret
- guilt (about the past, or about being happy in the future)
- abandonment
- anxiety
- worry.

Changes to thoughts

It can be hard not to think about the loss all the time. You might notice your mind wander and have trouble focusing.

Some people find it hard to care as much about things. It can feel like nothing matters. Some people might think that the world doesn't make sense anymore, and they can't figure out their place in it.

Changes in your body

Our mind and body are closely connected, so grief can have a big impact on our bodies too, such as:

- headaches
- body aches
- weight changes
- changes to your sleep
- changes to eating or appetite
- tiredness
- feeling sick or run down.

Changes in what you do

It can be hard to find the energy to keep up with day-to-day life. Some people might not want to see their family and friends or do things they used to enjoy. Other people find that keeping busy helps them to get through the day.

How long will this go on for?

It's hard to know how long grief will last because everyone is different. However, it's important to know that eventually, things will get easier.

It might be helpful to think of grief like the ocean. Sometimes the power of the ocean is so strong you can feel out of control. Other times it feels manageable, and you can drift along with the waves.

What can I do to help with my grief?

Grief, and everything that can come with it, can be really intense. If you've experienced loss there are things you can do.

Healthy habits

Try to eat well, cut back on alcohol and other drugs and get a good night's sleep. Setting yourself small, easier goals can help keep up your motivation.

Get into life

Doing stuff can be one of the best ways to help life improve, even when you might not feel like doing anything. Find something that works for you like playing or listening to music, walking, hanging out with family or friends or watching movies.

What else should I look out for?

Grief isn't depression. However, it's important to know that grief can leave you vulnerable to experiencing depression in the future. If you're not sure what's happening for you, it can be helpful to reach out for support.

During tough times, some people can turn to alcohol or other drugs to try to get through the pain. This might feel helpful at the time however it can create other problems in the long run.



Find something that works for you like playing or listening to music, walking, hanging out with family or friends or watching movies.

Take it easy on yourself

Being kind to yourself is always a good idea, but it's even more important when you're having a tough time. Remind yourself that grief hurts, it's hard and it takes time to heal. Feeling confused, overwhelmed, angry (or anything else) and being upset is OK.

Talk about it

Though it can be hard reaching out to others, it can help you feel supported and less alone. Whether you're speaking to a trusted friend, family member, teacher, Elder or a counsellor, it's up to you what you feel comfortable sharing. You might just want to say you're having a tough time.

Getting support

If you're finding it hard to cope and your normal activities like your social life, work or studies are being affected, then it's a good idea to ask for professional support.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au

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understanding bullying

Bullying is not just playing around or harmless fun. Bullying happens when someone has (or thinks they have) more power than someone else.

This could be:

- power in numbers
- being older or stronger
- being popular
- being in the majority.

Bullying can increase the risk of developing mental health problems for everyone involved, particularly those experiencing the bullying. It can take place anywhere like at home, work, school, TAFE/uni, online or over the phone.



Bullying is not OK, it's not simply 'a normal part of growing up', it's never the person being bullied's fault, and help is always available.

Different forms of bullying

- **Verbal** (e.g., putting someone down or threatening to cause harm).
- **Physical** (e.g., contact that hurts someone or breaks their things).
- **Social** (e.g., spreading rumours, excluding someone, embarrassing someone in public).
- **Cyberbullying** (e.g., sending harmful messages, pictures or making comments on social networking sites. This type of bullying can be anonymous and posted online where it can be seen by lots of people. And it can go on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, so people don't get a rest from it).

Bullying can also be done secretly, like doing or saying something behind someone's back. This type of bullying can be harder to see, but it's no less damaging.

Why might bullying happen?

There are many reasons why someone might use bullying behaviour. People who bully may have experienced bullying, trauma or violence themselves. It's still important to remember though, this doesn't make it OK.

People might use bullying because they feel peer pressure, and are trying to feel more secure, more powerful, 'look cool' in front of others, or feel better about themselves. This may be their way of coping if they haven't learnt healthier ways to cope or aren't getting the support they need. Bullying behaviour can also happen because of jealousy, lack of knowledge, fear or misunderstanding.

Bullying is very complex. A person might use bullying behaviour, be a bystander, and/or experience bullying. It can depend on who is around and what the situation is. Each of these roles can have a negative impact on mental health and can make experiencing mental health problems more likely.

What are the effects of bullying?

Anyone who has experienced bullying knows how upsetting it is. People who experience bullying might feel:

- alone
- unsafe
- afraid
- stressed
- humiliated
- angry
- ashamed
- rejected.

Sometimes a person might feel that there is no escape and may do things to 'fit in', like changing their appearance or acting differently. They may believe some of the awful things said about them, which can impact their sense of self. Sometimes they might want to hurt others, or themselves, because of it.

Being bullied can affect a person's performance at school, uni, TAFE or

work, and can continue to affect them through their life adulthood.

Experiencing bullying can also increase the risk that someone will develop depression and anxiety in the future, and it can increase the risk of self-harm, suicidal thinking and suicide.

Bullying can be traumatic, especially when carried out or ignored by others, as having supportive relationships are really important in everyone's life.

Young people report one of the worst parts of bullying is feeling like they're going through it alone, which is why it's so important to support anyone going through a tough time/help them access support or reach out if you're having a hard time yourself.



What can you do about bullying?

Face to face

- Stay calm. Try focusing on your breathing as a way to stay calm. Staying calm and not showing that you are overwhelmed can help you to feel better.
- Don't fight back, as this can make the situation worse, get yourself hurt or blamed for starting the trouble.
- Try to ignore the bullying by calmly turning and walking away. If the person doing the bullying tries to stop or block you, try to be firm and clear. Having friends to stand with you or walk you away is a great idea in these moments.
- Try to avoid the person who is bullying you or ask a friend to stay with you when they're around.
- Tell a trusted adult what has happened straight away. They can support you and help you find ways to get the bullying to stop.
- Get some more information. Schools, universities, TAFEs and workplaces have anti-bullying policies that can help you to find out what you can do.

Cyberbullying

- Report any bullying to the site where it is occurring. All social media platforms have a reporting system. It's anonymous, straightforward and depending on what you've reported, there's a chance it could get taken down quickly.
- Keep everything that is sent to you with screenshots, whether they're nasty comments, pictures or messages – try to get a permanent copy of it. This is so you can show these to someone you trust later on.
- Contact the eSafety Commissioner, if after 48 hours the image or content has not been removed by the site, or if you're feeling afraid or threatened.
- Talk to people you trust. Let them know how you're feeling and that you need their support.
- Ask your friends to stand up for you by challenging the bullying in low-risk ways.
- Talk to your parents, carer, teacher or another trusted adult about what's happening. When families and schools work together, this is the best way to address it.
- Block the person or people from being able to contact you and change your privacy settings to protect what you post on social media.
- Delete your current online account and start a new one if the bullying is persistent and ongoing. Only give your new details to trusted friends.



Remember, it's unlikely that everyone agrees with the person bullying, even if they don't say something to support you. They might be afraid of getting involved or could be ignoring the person bullying as a way of not joining in. It's important that everyone feels comfortable standing up for one another in ways that won't put them at risk.

What is a bystander?

Someone who sees or knows about the bullying is called a bystander. It can feel difficult to step in, but a bystander can have a big effect on whether the bullying continues or not. It can also help someone who has been targeted see they have people who support them.

What can I do if I'm a bystander?

Try not to support the bullying by looking on and doing nothing, laughing at the person being bullied or by 'liking' or sharing hurtful photos or posts online.

If you feel safe, step in and speak up in an assertive but not an aggressive way. Show the person that you're there for them by spending time chatting with them and helping them to walk away from the situation. Remind the person being bullied there is always help available.

It's important to think carefully about your safety before you try to stop the bullying. If you can't safely take action yourself, report it to a trusted adult and let them know you want to remain anonymous.

Getting support

If you're being bullied, it's a good idea to build your supports and know you're not alone. Building a support network of family, friends, Elders, staff from school or work and/or mental health professionals is important to getting support and putting a stop to bullying as quickly as possible.

See our website for more information about bullying and how to support your mental wellbeing – headspace.org.au



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understanding gender identity

Gender identity is how you think and feel about your gender, how you show this to others, and how you want others to treat you.



About gender identity

The physical features you were born with (sex assigned at birth) don't necessarily define your gender. Although gender has traditionally been divided into 'male' and 'female', there are a diverse range of gender identities.

For example, you could identify with a gender that's different from the sex you were assigned at birth, such as:

- being assigned female at birth, but identifying as a male
- being assigned male at birth, but identifying as a female
- being born with both male and female sex characteristics and identifying as male, female, or another identity
- identifying somewhere between male and female
- recognising yourself as another gender identity.

Some people may not have a label for what they're experiencing and some might be exploring their gender identity, and that's OK too.

Young people who are gender diverse or don't identify with the gender they were assigned at birth can live exciting and fulfilling lives. However, a lack of understanding, acceptance, discrimination and transphobia can contribute to an increased risk of depression, anxiety, self harm and suicide.

Why might this be difficult to experience?

Some common experiences that can affect your wellbeing and increase your vulnerability to developing mental health difficulties are:

- feeling different from other people around you
- experiencing bullying about your gender identity, whether verbal, physical or online
- experiencing discrimination – being treated differently or excluded – because of your gender identity (this is against the law in Australia)
- feeling pressure to define or deny your feelings regarding your gender identity
- feeling unsupported or worried that your gender identity will not be accepted by family and friends, along with the possibility of being rejected or isolated
- feeling stressed and anxious in relation to the pressure to conform with your sex assigned at birth.



Feeling these pressures can be stressful, especially with any other stresses you might be experiencing in your life such as managing studies or work, job hunting, forming relationships or making sense of who you are and your place in the world.

Noticing the impact on your mental health

It can be hard to know if you're experiencing early signs of a mental health problem. Things to look out for include:

- changes in mood – feeling sadder, more anxious or more irritable
- changes in behaviour – being less talkative, becoming withdrawn or being more aggressive
- changes in relationships – falling out with friends or your partner, or conflict with family
- changes in appetite – eating more or less than usual, or losing or gaining weight without trying to
- changes in sleep patterns – sleeping more or less than usual
- changes in coping – feeling overwhelmed or tired of life
- changes in thinking – more negative thoughts, or thoughts of self harm or suicide.

If you have been experiencing any of these things for a long time, you might not see them as changes.



Getting the right support

While it's normal to occasionally experience some of these things, if you're finding it hard to cope and your social life, work or studies are being affected, then it's time to get support.

Getting support when problems develop can reduce the effects of mental health challenges and can help prevent more serious issues developing in the future.

Some transgender or gender diverse young people find it very hard to ask for help. This might be because of discrimination by health professionals in the past, worries about privacy, or difficulty talking to strangers about gender identity.

It's important to find someone you can trust to support you throughout your journey. This might be your general practitioner (GP) and/or other health professionals experienced in working with gender diverse young people. headspace can also help connect you with specialists for specific needs around gender transition if you decide to go down that path.

It can take time to find the health professional who is right for you, so don't give up if you don't find the

right person straight away. Remember that you don't have to discuss your gender identity if you don't feel comfortable or safe.

A trusted friend, teacher, Elder or family member might also be able to recommend someone to talk to.



You can find tips for a healthy headspace on the headspace website if you're feeling stressed or having a hard time.

Remember that you're not alone and there are many young people exploring and questioning their gender identity. If you want to talk through any questions or concerns about your gender identity, or if you're having a hard time, there are people who can help and support you.

If you ever feel unable to cope because of intense emotions, or if you have thoughts of harming yourself, then ask for help immediately. Navigating your gender identity can be challenging at times, but it's important to remember that there are lots of people who can celebrate and support you as you learn more about yourself.

Getting support

Youth support services

qheadspace

Chat anonymously with other young people who identify as LGBTIQ+ and ask questions of our headspace queer peers. headspace.org.au/qheadspace

Qlife

Chat to a peer support volunteer over the phone or through web-chat every day from 3pm to midnight (all ages). qlife.org.au

Minus18

Have lots of resources about gender diversity for young people and their families. minus18.org.au

Kids Helpline

1800 55 1800 (5-25 years)
kidshelpline.com.au

SANE Australia

1800 187 263 (18+ years)
sane.org



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understanding your sexuality and diverse sexual identity

Sexuality is about how you see your identity and express yourself romantically and sexually. There are lots of words people use to describe their sexuality, many of which are captured by the term **LGBTIQ+** (which also includes gender identity).



What does LGBTIQ+ mean?



Lesbian
Someone who identifies as a woman and is attracted to other people who identify as women.



Gay
Someone who is attracted to people who identify as the same gender.



Bisexual
Someone who is attracted to people of the same gender and people of another gender. Bisexuality does not necessarily assume there are only two genders.



Transgender or trans people
Someone whose personal and gender identity is different from the one they were assigned at birth.



Intersex
Someone who is born with chromosomes, reproductive organs, or genitals that don't fit the narrow medical or social expectations of what it means to have a male or female body.



Queer
This term has many different meanings, but it has been reclaimed by many as a proud term to describe sexuality or gender that is anything other than cisgender and/or heterosexual.



Asexual
Someone who has low or no sexual attraction to any gender, but may have a romantic attraction towards another person.



+
This acknowledges there are many other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

What if I'm not sure of my sexuality?

It's common for young people to be unsure of their sexuality (exploring) or to experience fluid sexuality (when someone's sexuality changes over time). Some young people prefer to identify as queer, as it's broader and does not place someone into a category. Others might not like the idea of these terms and don't want to identify their sexuality at all and that's OK too.



It's important to remember that your identity is your right. The way you want to describe it, and who you share that with, is completely up to you.



How do I explain it to others?

Coming out or inviting others in

The idea of coming out or sharing your sexuality with others can feel really scary. Some people prefer to think of it as inviting others in rather than coming out. Some people, due to safety, might choose not to share their sexuality with certain people. Everyone's journey looks different, and everyone has the right to be treated with respect.

It's hard to know what other people will think or how they'll react when you talk to them about your sexuality. Unfortunately, it's not something you can control. Not all people will have a positive experience if they come out.

Here are some things to consider when discussing your sexuality with others:

- Have the conversation when/if you feel ready.
- It's up to you to choose who you want to tell and what you want to tell them.
- You may want to suss people out first – perhaps by asking them for their thoughts on an LGBTIQA+ topic, like a TV show with a queer character.
- Have the conversation when everyone is comfortable and relaxed in a place that is safe for you.
- Expect a range of reactions. People might surprise you.
- Give it time. Some people might respond better after they've thought about it for a while.
- Try to keep calm, even if the other person is not.
- If you need to call a time-out, have a plan in place. You could say something like, 'I still want to talk more about this, but we're too worked up at the moment'.
- Responses can range from tolerance, to acceptance, to celebration. There may be others who don't accept your sexual identity no matter how you share it or how much time goes by. This can be painful, especially if it's someone you love or respect. But remember, you don't need anyone's approval or permission to be yourself.

Dealing with discrimination

If you're being unfairly treated because of your sexuality, this is called discrimination. Although discrimination is illegal in Australia, many young people still experience unfair treatment. If you have been affected by discrimination or any of these negative experiences, it's important to reach out for support.

Taking care of yourself

People exploring their sexuality may be faced with challenges that can affect their mental health and wellbeing, such as:

- other people making them feel 'different'
- rejection/fear of rejection
- bullying
- discrimination such as homophobia, biphobia and/or transphobia (verbal or physical)
- feeling pressure to deny or change their sexuality
- worries about coming out to others
- feeling unsupported or misunderstood
- being excluded or left out at school, uni, TAFE, work or in the community
- a desire to suppress or avoid unwanted preferences.

Find a supportive community

It's important to remember that there is a strong LGBTIQA+ community to embrace and support you. Finding these communities can be tough, but be assured that they're out there! A simple Google search can help you find local support groups or online communities. Everyone deserves to have people who understand them, so it's useful to meet people with similar experiences to you.



If someone makes you feel badly about your sexuality, there are things you can do to take care of yourself.

Getting support

If you're finding it hard to cope or your social, work or studies are being affected, it's time to reach out to a trusted friend, family member, Elder, teacher, counsellor or health service.

Look after your mental health and wellbeing by:

- visiting the headspace website for tips for healthy headspace (headspace.org.au/tips)
- connecting with the LGBTIQA+ community through social groups and online communities
- checking out online support services, such as Qlife or ReachOut
- connecting with qheadspace: chat anonymously with other young people who identify as LGBTIQA+ and ask questions of our headspace queer peers (12-25 years).



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au

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understanding sex and sexual health

Am I ready for sex?

If you're thinking about having sex you might feel nervous or excited. Even if it's not your first time, it's normal to experience a range of emotions.

It's important that you feel confident and ready, so it might be helpful to ask yourself these questions:

- am I doing this because I want to?
- do I feel safe and respected?
- do I feel comfortable talking about sex, sexual health and contraception?
- do I feel comfortable having sex with someone not under the influence of alcohol or other drugs?
- do I know how to have sex safely?
- what is the law about sex in my state? (Check out Youth Law Australia – yla.org.au)
- have I discussed safe sex with my partner/s?

What is sexual consent?

Sexual consent is an ongoing and freely given agreement between people who are engaging in sexual activity together.

- Consent to any sexual act needs to be stated clearly – don't just assume they're into it.
- Setting physical/sexual boundaries means continuously checking in with each other about what is and isn't OK. If someone consents to one sexual act, it doesn't mean they consent to another. Ongoing communication is one of the key steps to consent.
- People can change their minds anytime. If you feel uncomfortable at any stage, it's perfectly OK to let the other person know that you want to slow down or stop.
- Alcohol and other drugs can impact our ability to give consent, say no to sexual activity or recognise when someone isn't giving consent. It can be helpful to limit alcohol and other drug use before sexual activity.
- Discussing and agreeing on contraception and actions to prevent sexually transmitted infections is another way you can practise consent.
- The age that someone can consent to any kind of sexual activity varies slightly between states and territories in Australia. Check out Youth Law Australia for more information about the age of consent in your state and territory.



What is sexual health?

Good sexual health requires a respectful and positive attitude around the decisions you make about sexual activity. It's also about having the right information so you can enjoy yourself and help prevent things like sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unplanned pregnancies.

What is sexuality?

For many people, sexuality is an important part of who we are, what we feel and how we respond to others. It's about how we see our identity and express ourselves romantically and sexually. It's important to remember that your identity is your right. The way you want to describe it, and who you share that with, is completely up to you.

A person may identify as:

- gay
- lesbian
- bisexual
- heterosexual
- pansexual
- queer
- asexual
- something else (or not yet sure).

If you have any questions about your sexuality you might like to talk to someone you trust, like a friend, family member, Elder, teacher or counsellor.



What are sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)?

STIs can get passed on during sexual contact (kissing, touching, oral, anal and vaginal) through blood, saliva, semen or vaginal fluids. Not all types are treatable. While medical treatment can treat some STIs, it may only help relieve symptoms for others.

Some STIs include:

- chlamydia
- gonorrhoea
- herpes/cold sores
- genital warts
- hepatitis
- HIV.

Some symptoms of STIs include:

- unusual and/or smelly discharge
- pain during urination/sex
- sores, blisters, ulcers, warts or rashes
- pain in the scrotum or testicles
- some STIs can lead to infertility if left untreated.

Other times, signs or symptoms of having an STI are not obvious – a person can have an STI without knowing it. The best way to detect an STI is to get tested. This can be done through a doctor or at a sexual health clinic.

Using barrier protection like condoms, diaphragms and dental dams are methods that can reduce the risk of most STIs, but they need to be used correctly.

Being able to communicate openly about sexual health stuff is important.

For more on STIs, check out HealthDirect's articles (healthdirect.gov.au).



Check out the headspace website for more information about sex and relationships.

Practising safe sex

Practising safe sex decreases our chances of being exposed to an STI. Remember though, nothing is ever 100% risk free.

Sexual activity between people who have vaginas has a lower risk of STI transmission, but lower risk doesn't mean there's no risk at all. Similarly, anal sex (regardless of gender identity or sexuality) has a higher chance of resulting in an STI but using condoms correctly can dramatically reduce that risk.

Preventing HIV

As well as using condoms, there are specific things that you can take before or after sex to reduce the chance of getting HIV from a partner. Talk to your GP or a sexual health nurse for more information. Some headspace centres have GPs – check with yours.

Contraception

There are different forms of contraception, that when used properly, can be very effective at preventing unwanted pregnancy.

Types of contraception include:

- contraceptive pill
- condoms
- diaphragms
- contraceptive injections
- contraceptive implants (e.g., Implanon, IUD)

There are other forms of contraception. Speak to your GP or trusted medical professional about these options.

Condoms are the only form of contraception that can protect against both pregnancy and STIs.

Contraception is not 100% effective.

There's always a very small chance of pregnancy. Using hormonal contraceptive (the pill) and a condom is the safest option to prevent unplanned pregnancy.

If you're worried you may be pregnant, because you recently had unprotected sex, you can speak to a chemist/health professional about the emergency contraceptive pill (ECP). This is sometimes called the 'morning after pill'. It's important to take it as soon as possible after you had unprotected sex.

Getting tested

If you're sexually active, it's recommended that you get tested for STIs every 6–12 months, when you change partners, or when you show symptoms. This can be done as part of a routine visit to the general practitioner (GP), a sexual health clinic, or at a headspace centre.

It can sometimes help to talk it through with someone first. You may want to get advice from someone you trust, like a friend, family member, Elder, teacher or counsellor.

Your GP can also give you information to help you maintain your sexual health.



Talking to your partner/s about sexual health

This is a really important step in looking after your sexual health.

Discuss whether you or they:

- have had an STI before, and whether it has been treated
- have had a sexual health check and when
- are in agreement about safe sex practices, like types of protection and contraception.



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understanding sexual consent

Romantic and sexual relationships come in all shapes and sizes. Yet there are some things that healthy relationships have in common; they are built on respect, clear boundaries and consent.



Why is it important?

Asking for and giving sexual consent is one way we can maintain healthy relationships and make sure everyone's feeling safe, comfortable, respected, and that no-one is breaking the law. The older we get the more common sexual and romantic relationships can become so it's important to get this right.

What is sexual consent?

Sexual consent is an ongoing and freely given agreement between people who are engaging in sexual activity together. It involves paying attention to what they're saying (or not saying), their body language and their facial expressions.

What does consent look like?

- you and your partner are excited, happy and eager to engage in sexual contact
- no-one is forced, pressured or manipulated into any kind of sexual contact
- anyone can change their mind, stop at any moment or choose not to engage any further
- everyone is fully conscious – no one is asleep or drowsy
- no-one is so affected by alcohol or other drugs that they can't make safe or informed choices
- everyone must agree upon choices regarding safe sex e.g., using condoms and other contraception
- consent applies only to the sexual act you're doing at the one time, in that very moment. Just because someone consents to kissing, doesn't mean they consent to someone touching their body.



Consent doesn't have to be awkward – just ask! And the other person can choose to agree or not.

What are some ways I can ask for consent?

Consent doesn't have to be awkward – just ask! And the other person can choose to agree or not. Like all agreements and conversations, we must also pay attention to someone's body language and tone of voice. If their facial expressions, body language (e.g., shrugging, arms crossed or avoiding kisses) or tone of voice don't add up with their answer, then you don't have consent. Remember, consent must be enthusiastic.

Asking for consent may sound like:

'Can I kiss you?'; 'Would you like me to touch you there?'; 'What else can I do for you?'

When you don't get consent:

Remember, if a person doesn't give consent, then you can't force or pressure them to change their mind. This means that everyone feels safe and respected, and that you don't break any laws.

What are some ways I can give my consent?

As well as asking for someone else's consent, it's important that you've given consent.

Showing your consent might sound like:

I really like that; can you keep doing it?

Yes. That sounds like a really nice idea.

Feel free to touch me here.

Showing that you don't consent might sound like:

No. I don't want to.

That's sweet of you, but I'd rather not.

That doesn't feel good for me anymore. Let's try something else.

Power and control

Not everyone can give sexual consent, even if they want to. This is because there must be equal levels of power and control between everyone involved. It can be hard to say no to sex if there is an unequal power balance.

Things that can influence our power in relation to someone else include:

- our age
- our relationship to the other person
- our ability to fully understand what someone is asking us to do
- their control in our lives – they might control the money, decide if you can see your family and friends, or tell you what to wear.

Some professions have rules that prevent certain people/occupations from engaging in sexual contact with young people. This is because they may be seen as providing care for and/or they have more power and control over the young person.

The following people can't engage in sexual contact with young people:

- direct family members
- anyone who is seen to care for young people e.g., teachers, tutors and coaches
- treating medical professionals e.g., doctors, psychologists and support workers
- anyone providing legal representation or advice to young people including lawyers and police officers.

What does the law say?

Age of consent

The age that someone can consent to any kind of sexual contact varies slightly between state and territories in Australia.



You can check which laws apply to your state or territory at yla.org.au

Sexting

There are also different laws around consent and sexting/sending nudes.



You can find out more at yla.org.au and navigate to the topic of sexting via the internet, phones and technology section.

Getting support

For more information on healthy relationships, check out our website.

If reading this resource has raised any concerns for you in relation to your own experiences, help is available:

Sexual assault information, support and helplines
healthdirect.gov.au/sexual-assault-and-rape

24-hour sexual assault counselling –
fullstop.org.au

Relationship resources and counselling
1800RESPECT
1800respect.org.au



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understanding and maintaining healthy romantic relationships

Romantic relationships come in all shapes and sizes, and there's no single set of rules about what they should be.

Yet there are some things that healthy relationships have in common – good communication, being respectful and supportive, and feeling safe and secure.

From something casual to a committed relationship, your safety and happiness should never be at risk.



Building your relationship

Healthy relationships can take time and effort. Here are some tips you can use to help build yours.



Treat each other as equals

Treating each other as equals helps keep relationships strong, safe and supportive.

It means everyone is:

- willing to compromise where appropriate
- experiencing equal give and take
- respecting each other's ideas, boundaries and choices
- working together to understand each other's needs.



Set boundaries

Setting boundaries is an important part of all relationships. They help to define the things, activities and behaviours that are needed to keep you happy and connected – they help you and your partner understand your limits.

Emotional boundaries

Emotional boundaries include sharing your feelings and your life stories. Do you want to get into details or take it slow and build trust along the way? They also include your need for space and time apart. It's a good idea to maintain your external friendships and hobbies and to encourage your partner to do the same.

Financial boundaries

Discussing financial boundaries helps you both be clear about how you want finances to work. Some people choose to share their money and others prefer to keep things separate. It really depends on what works best for you.

Physical and/or sexual boundaries

The key to physical and/or sexual boundaries is respect and consent. Consider the amount and type of any physical and/or sexual contact and what is OK for you.

Sexual consent is an ongoing and freely given agreement between people who are engaging in any sexual activity together. To learn more visit headspace.org.au/explore-topics/for-young-people/sexual-consent.

Digital boundaries

What are you OK with when it comes to sharing personal information or sexual content online or with other people? (e.g., posting details about the relationship; using each other's devices; sexting/nudes).

It's important to remember that your body is yours and any form of violence, intimidation or overstepping of your boundaries isn't acceptable and is not a part of healthy relationships.



Communication

Healthy relationships include open and honest communication. Communicating well with your partner can strengthen your relationship and help you overcome any challenges.

Opening up to your partner can take trust, time and practice. Speaking up about what you think, feel and need is an important part of any relationship.

Being able to be ourselves is important, it helps us feel confident and understood. It builds trust in the relationship and helps both partners understand each other's likes and dislikes.

Be a good listener

Listening is an important part of a healthy relationship. Everyone needs the opportunity to be heard, talk uninterrupted and be taken seriously.

Resolving conflict

It's OK to have different opinions – practise disagreeing and asserting yourself respectfully. Try to avoid personal attacks and instead focus on the issue. For example:

- try to see your partner's point of view
- be willing to compromise and come up with options you're willing to accept
- admit when you're in the wrong
- agree to disagree
- if it gets heated, agree to take some time and come back to the discussion later.

Trust

Trust in relationships helps you feel safe and secure – it's important for both partners to trust and be trusted.

It can take time to build and earn trust though and it can be built in many ways such as:

- respecting boundaries
- being honest
- being there for your partner – not taking them for granted
- feeling physically and emotionally safe in the relationship
- admitting your mistakes
- resolving arguments respectfully.

Getting support

No matter where you are on your relationship journey support is always available.

Reach out to a trusted friend, family member, teacher, Elder, counsellor or a support service like 1800RESPECT – 1800respect.org.au for relationship counselling and resources.

Check out our further tips and try an interactive activity on our website via the QR code below.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au

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dealing with relationship break ups

Relationships break up for lots of reasons and they are often out of our control.

Break ups can be tough, even when you know that it might have been what you needed. Some people feel as though their world has turned upside down and that things will never be good again, and others can feel relief and happiness. There's no right or wrong way to feel.

It's OK to feel whatever you're feeling, lots of people do. Be kind to yourself; it can take time to heal after the loss of a relationship.

Break up challenges

Everyone experiences break ups differently, but some things people might experience are:

- low energy
- restlessness
- loss of hope
- loss of appetite
- lower motivation
- sadness
- anger
- changes to sleep.

Some people might lose the friendships they made with or through their partner, and this can be really upsetting.

Whatever you're feeling now won't last forever, but it might take some time to recover.



Recognise there will be good days and not-so-good days and always be kind to yourself.



Some things to remember

- If you ended the relationship, it doesn't necessarily make the break up decision any easier.
- If someone ended the relationship with you it doesn't mean that there's anything wrong with you. Try not to take it personally because relationship break ups affect lots of people at different times in their lives.
- It's better not to be in a relationship than to be in an unhealthy or unsafe one – remember, you don't have to be in a relationship to feel happy.
- Many people feel upset or angry during this time. Always make sure you're safe in how you express your feelings.
- Try not to feel embarrassed or to worry about how the situation will look to others. Now is the time to focus on you.
- Try to see the positives in a break up. You can learn more about yourself and what you want in future relationships.
- Remember that with time and support you can get through a relationship break up.

Things that can help after a break up

It might be tempting to try and get over a break up quickly, but it can take a bit of time, work and support. It's OK not to feel OK.

After a break up it's a good idea to prioritise and support yourself:

Talk

Talk to trusted friends, family members, Elders or others who can support you.

Give yourself some space

You don't need to shut your ex out of your life but having a break from them can give you some healing space. Consider taking a break from them on social media too.

Keep busy

You might find yourself with too much free time on your hands, especially on weekends. Plan ahead and do things that you usually enjoy.

Take time out for you

Do things that you find relaxing, like watching a movie, listening to music, or getting into nature.



Try not to use alcohol and other drugs to deal with the pain

While they might help you feel better at first, the after-effects will leave you feeling much worse.

Give it time

Allow yourself time to cope with the change after a break up.

Sleep well

Set yourself up a sleep routine. Apps can help with this.

Stay active

It might feel like the last thing you want to do, but it's at times like this it can be the most helpful.

Eat well

Food nourishes our bodies and brains and can help with our mood.

Get into a routine

Having a routine can help with stress by making things predictable. They also make you more likely to do the tasks.



Spending time with supportive people can help get your mind off things and can help you see things from a different point of view.

Getting support

Relationship break ups can really hurt, however people usually work through them in time and without any serious problems.

If you're having a hard time moving on, or if you feel unsafe in any way, it's important to talk things through with someone you trust like a friend, family member, Elder, counsellor, or a health service.



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how to cope with the stress of natural disasters

It's common to need support after being in or witnessing an event that may be traumatic, such as bushfires, flooding, cyclones or drought.

It's important to find the right type of support for you, as everyone will be affected differently.

There are specific things that are likely to be helpful in the days and weeks following a natural disaster. As time passes in the months after, the types of things that are likely to be helpful will be a bit different.

It can help to talk with a trusted adult about getting the right sort of help if it all feels a bit much.

Tips for the initial days and weeks after a natural disaster

In the days and weeks after a disaster, it is important to do things that make you feel physically and emotionally safe.

It can help to:

- Find ways to connect with others, especially those who help you feel OK and support your wellbeing.
- Do things that make you feel calm and grounded. Try doing things you enjoy and include these in your routine.
- Explore ways to get involved with repair and recovery of your community. This can help give you a sense of hope and connect you with others which is important to recovery.
- Be mindful of exposure to traumatic information through stories and traditional and social media. It can be helpful to take regular breaks from the 24-hour news cycle.

(Hobfoll et al, 2007)



Try to avoid or limit alcohol and other drugs.

Tips for the shorter and longer term after a natural disaster

- Acknowledge that it was a tough time. You may have been impacted by the disaster in other ways (e.g., through media, or losing a loved one). It's OK to remind yourself that the events were out of your control.
- Be patient with yourself. It can take time to make sense of what happened. It's OK to need someone to remind you that you're safe.
- It's OK to start small. It's important to keep up any regular routines or activities. This could be daily activities, like attending school, work, sports or catching up with friends. It could be planning your day and trying to stick to that.
- It's normal to feel like you want to help the recovery process. You might like to look for ways you can contribute to help yourself and others to rebuild. It's also OK if this doesn't feel right just yet.
- Be aware of the triggers that remind you how you felt during or after the disaster. This could include particular sounds, smells, or images.
- Practise being calm. You might try deep breathing or relaxation exercises. Rest and comfort will also help you to feel calm.
- Connect with others. Being with people who understand you and are calm can help you maintain calmness as well.
- Avoid getting into situations that are unsafe and avoid taking big risks.
- Try to eat nutritious food. Eating well can help with your mood, sleep, physical health and wellbeing.



In the weeks, months, and years after being impacted by a natural disaster there are things you can do that can help.



Tips to maintain a healthy headspace during bushfire season

Talk to others

Talking to a trusted friend, family member, Elder, teacher or counsellor about any concerns and feelings you are having can be helpful. Talking to your family is also a good opportunity to ask questions you might have about your family's plans in an emergency.

Get involved

If you feel able to, you might want to get involved in preparation activities. Talking to your parents and family members about what steps you can take to prepare for an emergency can help you feel calmer and more in control. It's important to focus on one step at a time. This could include packing an emergency kit or helping your parents prepare the house. Talking to your family about what to do if you are separated during an emergency can also help you feel prepared.

Connect with others

Keeping in contact with friends, family, and neighbours, especially during days with a high risk for bushfires, can help you feel connected. You might feel like participating in community activities – even those that aren't about the bushfires. Getting connected with people who are reassuring and comforting, and who allow you to be you, can help you get through tough times.

Practise calming techniques

Some people might want to practise techniques to help them feel calm. This can include breathing exercises. Find a quiet place, close your eyes and slow your breathing. Try to focus your attention on your breath. It can help to count your breaths as you go (e.g., 'one' for every inhale and 'two' for every exhale). You might also want to use apps or websites that help with regulating your breath.

Be aware of your media exposure

Although many people want to keep up-to-date with what's happening, being around too much bushfire news can feel overwhelming. If you notice that the news is making you feel anxious or stressed, take a break if it's safe to do so (e.g., set yourself limits for media use, manage your app notifications, or unfollow pages or accounts that make you feel uncomfortable).

Look after yourself when you support others

During the bushfire season, your family members may be busier than before and you might spend more time looking after others. Some young people might feel responsible for others' wellbeing. You can help others by being calm and listening to their worries. You can link younger family members with a trusted adult or a service who can help them.

Some young people may also feel overwhelmed or guilty if they feel they can't meet the needs of others. It's important to look after your own wellbeing and to talk to other family members about how you're feeling.

Have hope

Remind yourself of the steps your community has taken to prepare for the bushfire season or to recover from it. Thinking of how your community has successfully dealt with difficult situations in the past can help you feel hopeful. Some people might like to explore ways of getting involved with bushfire preparedness or the repair and recovery of their community. This can help give a sense of hope. It's also OK if you don't feel ready for that.

Do enjoyable things

While it's important to be prepared for an emergency, it's also important to look after your headspace by doing things that create good feelings. If there's no immediate danger, this can include making plans, seeing family and friends, engaging in hobbies, or relaxing.

Getting support

It's normal to experience a variety of reactions to the bushfire season. This doesn't mean you'll have ongoing problems. For some people, using these tips will be enough to manage the social and emotional impact that can come during bushfire season. If you're noticing a significant impact on your emotions, your daily activities or you're not finding any improvement, it's important to get professional help.



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maintaining a healthy headspace during the bushfire season

The timing and duration of bushfire danger seasons vary across different regions in Australia.



The threat of bushfires can directly affect people living in high-risk areas. It's also normal to have reactions if you live further away and are indirectly affected (e.g., by media exposure or hearing from others).

People respond in very different ways to the bushfire season and it can be a tough time. There is no 'right' response and reactions can change over time. Some people may not feel impacted by the bushfire season and that's OK too.



Taking positive action and anticipating your emotional reactions during the bushfire season can be helpful for your wellbeing during and after this time.

What might I feel?

Some common experiences people have during bushfire season include:

- Feeling overlooked because information is often directed at adults.
- Feeling stressed or overwhelmed by the threat of bushfires or even the memories and experiences associated with past bushfires.
- Feeling distressed by things that remind us of previous bushfires (e.g., smells, sounds, images or even anniversaries).
- Having work, school, studies or relationships disrupted.
- Feeling fearful, anxious or worried.
- Wanting to avoid thinking about memories of previous bushfires. This might feel helpful, but this can make things feel worse in the long run.
- Feelings of shock, anger, confusion, helplessness and sadness.



Common reactions to a natural disaster

Natural disasters can be hard to cope with. People can respond in very different ways, which can also change over time. Some people might feel OK immediately after the disaster but become overwhelmed later.

After a natural disaster people can experience:

- fear and anxiety
- grief and loss
- difficulty concentrating, remembering things, or describing what happened
- anger and confusion
- sadness and emptiness
- denial
- guilt
- shock.

Other challenges

Following a natural disaster, other areas of life can be impacted, these may include; relationships with others, worrying about others, having to take care of siblings, wanting to be alone, sleep, appetite, and possibly alcohol or other drug use.

These can be normal reactions and natural coping responses. It's helpful to try to address these early, to prevent them from becoming ongoing issues. If they're starting to impact on your life, reach out for support.



How to look after yourself during a tough time?

After a traumatic event it's even more important than usual to focus on eating and sleeping well and staying active.

It can help to:

- have a routine
- allow yourself some 'worry time'
- set some realistic goals
- limit alcohol and other drug use
- use your strengths and connect with others.

People do recover from the impacts of natural disasters

Most people who experience traumatic events are able to recover. Some people may need to access professional support to navigate ongoing challenges.



Getting support

Very strong emotions normally start to settle by about six weeks after the disaster. If you have trouble with your emotions or with your usual daily activities after this time, then think about getting some professional help.

If you ever feel unable to cope because of overwhelming emotions, or if you have any thoughts of harming yourself, then ask for help immediately.

1. Hobfall et al. Five essential elements of immediate and mid-term mass trauma intervention: Empirical evidence. 2007; 70(4):283-315 (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/5668133_Five_Essential_Elements_of_Immediate_and_Mid-Term_Mass_Trauma_Intervention_Empirical_Evidence)



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mental health challenges

1. understanding depression
2. understanding anxiety
3. understanding bipolar
4. understanding psychosis
5. understanding disordered eating
and eating disorders
6. understanding alcohol
7. understanding anger
8. understanding loneliness



understanding depression

The word depression is often used when people are talking about times when they're feeling sad or down.

However, depression and feeling depressed is more than feeling sad. Depression is when feelings of sadness, emptiness and irritability last longer than two weeks, affect most parts of a person's daily life, and get in the way of them doing things that they normally enjoy.

There is no simple reason why depression happens. For some, a mix of events or challenges can end up

affecting how they feel, think and act. Things like constant stress, unhealthy relationships, discrimination, bullying or social isolation. For some it can be connected to family history, or individual coping styles, but sometimes there's no clear reason, and that can be frustrating to understand.



The good news is that people experiencing depression can and do get better.



signs and symptoms

Depression can be different for everyone, but there are some common signs and symptoms. These can include experiencing some of the following changes for more than two weeks:

Changes to feelings or emotions

Like feeling sad, numb, empty, irritable, guilty or like everything is too hard.

Changes to thoughts

Like having unhelpful thoughts, finding it hard to concentrate, or having thoughts of self harm or suicide.

Physical changes

Like feeling tired most of the time, difficulty sleeping, changes in appetite or unexplained aches or pains.

Behaviour changes

Like withdrawing from family or friends, losing interest in previously enjoyed activities, not getting things done or using more alcohol and other drugs.

Many people experience some of these symptoms at different times in their lives. What makes depression different is that the symptoms affect a person's daily life, and they don't tend to go away easily.

Sometimes people with depression experience other mental health challenges too, such as anxiety. Some may also use alcohol and other drugs, but these can make people feel much worse in the long term.



Depression and the link between suicide and self harm

Some young people who experience depression self harm or experience thoughts of suicide. Self harm and thoughts about suicide are often ways of trying to cope with difficult emotions.

If you have thoughts of suicide or self harm it's really important to talk to someone you trust, such as a family member, friend, an Elder, teacher or counsellor.

You can also develop a safety plan yourself to help cope with feelings of distress and suicidal thoughts by using the BeyondNow app (beyondblue.org.au/beyondnow).

For immediate help contact triple zero (000) if it is an emergency.

12%

of young people aged 15-24 reported feeling depressed or are diagnosed with a depressive disorder (Lawrence et al 2015)².



Getting support

For some people, using these tips will be enough to manage their symptoms of depression. But if the depression has been going on for too long without improvement, it's important to get professional help. The sooner you get help, the sooner you can recover.

So what can I do?

A part of depression means it can feel hard to find the energy or motivation to do these things. Sometimes it might feel like nothing will help. Try starting with one thing you know you can do, then slowly add things in step by step. This can build your confidence and help you feel like you're making progress.



There are lots of things that you can do to improve how you feel and get better at managing tough times.



Talk about it

It's a good idea to talk to someone that you trust about what's going on for you. Talking to others can help you feel understood and supported.

Take care of yourself

Looking after our minds and bodies can help us with our general mental health and wellbeing. You can:

- eat well to improve your mood, energy levels and general health and wellbeing
- stay active to help boost your energy, manage stress and boost your mood
- limit your use of alcohol and other drugs.

Get into life

Sometimes it can be difficult to do or think of enjoyable things when you're feeling low. It can take some extra effort but trying to do something that you used to enjoy, even if you don't feel like it can help lift your mood and energy.

Learn skills for tough times

Learning new ways to manage the thoughts, feelings and physical sensations of depression can be helpful. Speaking to a mental health clinician is one way to explore these and learn new skills.



1. ABS. National Health Survey: first results, 2017-18 Australia. ABS cat. no. 4364.0.55.001. Canberra; 2018.

2. Lawrence D et al. The mental health of children and adolescents: Report on the Second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing [Internet]. 2015. Available from: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/the-mental-health-of-children-and-adolescents>



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understanding anxiety

What is anxiety?

It's more than feeling stressed or worried.

Anxiety is something that we all experience from time to time. It's our body's way of preparing us to face challenging situations.

Sometimes anxiety can help us perform better by helping us feel alert and motivated.

Anxiety can come and go – but for some people, it can stick around for a long time, or occur in situations where you wouldn't normally expect to feel anxious. This can end up having a big impact on their daily lives.

When this happens, it might be time to do something about it.

Signs and symptoms

Everyone experiences anxiety differently, but there are some common signs and symptoms.

Physical signs can include:

- racing heart
- faster breathing
- feeling tense or having aches (especially neck, shoulders and back)
- sweating or feeling dizzy
- shaking
- 'butterflies' or feeling sick in the stomach.

Thoughts can include:

- worrying about things a lot of the time
- feeling like your worries are out of control
- having trouble concentrating and paying attention
- worries that seem out of proportion.

Other signs can include:

- being unable to relax
- avoiding people or places like school, uni or TAFE or parties and socialising
- withdrawing from family and friends
- feeling annoyed, irritated or restless
- difficulty getting to sleep at night or waking up a lot during the night.

Common types of anxiety disorders

Anxiety disorders involve more than temporary worries or fears. People can experience different types of anxiety disorders, but it's important to know that they can all be treated.

Generalised anxiety disorder

Some people may worry, and feel their worries are out of control about many areas of life (i.e., work, studies, health). They might feel tense and nervous most of the time, have trouble sleeping or find it hard to concentrate.

Social anxiety disorder

Some people may experience intense anxiety in social situations because of fear of embarrassment or judgement. This may lead to avoiding situations where there are other people.

Separation anxiety disorder

Some people experience intense fear about being away from loved ones or worry about them being hurt.

Agoraphobia

Some people feel intense anxiety about being in particular environments outside the home. This can include public spaces, public transport, enclosed spaces or crowds.

Specific phobias

Some people may experience a fear of a particular situation or object – like spiders or animals – that leads to a person avoiding that situation or object.

Panic disorder

Some people experience repeated panic attacks and ongoing fears about having more panic attacks.



Anxiety and depression

Many young people experiencing an anxiety disorder may also experience symptoms of depression. This can make things much more confusing. If you think this is happening for you, it's important to reach out for support.

What can I do to manage anxiety?

There are things you can try to help manage your anxiety so that it doesn't get in the way of your daily life.

Care for yourself

Managing anxiety starts with good self-care. Try to eat well, get enough sleep and stay active to help your overall mental health and wellbeing.

Talk about it

It's a good idea to talk about how you're feeling – whether it's with a trusted family member, friends, a teacher, coach, your mob or Elders. They can support you, help you understand what's going on, help you stick to your self-care goals and get extra help if needed.

Notice your thinking patterns

Being aware of how your thoughts can influence your anxiety is an important step towards managing it. It can help you understand what contributes to your anxiety and what your triggers are. This can help you to handle them differently and learn new ways to respond.

Be aware of avoidance

It's normal to want to avoid situations that make you feel anxious. It might work in the short-term, but over time it can make your anxiety feel worse. This is because you don't get the opportunity to learn that the thing you fear may not happen or be as bad as you think.

Learn some skills to cope with anxiety, like helpful self-talk and relaxation, then gradually face the things you fear and put your skills into action. As you realise you can manage anxious situations, you'll become more confident and motivated to keep going.

Try new breathing strategies

Lots of anxiety symptoms involve a cycle of physical sensations – pounding heart, shortness of breath, trembling and butterflies in the stomach. Working on slowing your breathing is a good way to try to interrupt that cycle. There are many apps that can help with this.

Limit your use of alcohol and other drugs

While alcohol and other drugs might help you to feel good in the short term, they can make you feel much worse in the longer term.

What are panic attacks?

Panic attacks can occur as part of any anxiety disorder, but not everyone will experience them. They are sudden rushes of intense anxiety or fear, together with frightening thoughts (e.g., 'I'm going to die', 'I can't breathe') and feelings (e.g., pounding heart, difficulty breathing).

Panic attacks can feel overwhelming, and usually last about 10 minutes. It's important to know these feelings pass.

Getting support

There are plenty of ways to manage your anxiety so that it doesn't get in the way of your daily life.

Check out the headspace website for tips on how to look after your mental health and to learn more about anxiety.

If you've tried some of these strategies for some time without improving despite your efforts, it's time to reach out to a trusted friend, family member, Elder, teacher, counsellor, or a health service.



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understanding bipolar

Bipolar disorder is a type of mood disorder where people experience times of excessive low mood (a depressive episode) and high mood (a manic episode).

These episodes affect the way people think, feel and act and this can interfere with all aspects of life like relationships, work or study and day-to-day living.

It's normal to experience a range of emotions in our lives. Emotions can be affected by the things going on around us e.g., with family or friends, stressful events, or sometimes by nothing at all. These ups and downs are common and generally don't cause too many problems. They can build our resilience and help us to learn how to manage difficult situations.

Bipolar disorder is different to general mood changes or anger outbursts. Mood changes associated with bipolar disorder are more extreme, last longer and have a significant impact on someone's ability to engage in their day-to-day activities.



With support, people diagnosed with bipolar disorder can lead lives they want to live.



Symptoms and experiences

The experience of bipolar disorder is different for everyone. Some people will have one or two episodes and then never have another one, while others have several episodes close together. Many people diagnosed with bipolar disorder lead full productive lives and have years without symptoms between episodes.

Bipolar episodes

What is a depressive episode?

A depressive episode is a period of lowered mood, with changes in thinking and behaviour that usually last for at least two weeks. It has a significant impact on a person's day-to-day life.

Often a depressive episode (or episodes) happen before a manic episode is experienced, but it depends on the individual.

Changes include:

- feeling in a low mood – sadness, irritability, tearfulness
- losing interest in enjoyable activities
- changes in appetite and weight – eating more or less than usual, gaining or losing weight rapidly
- changes in sleeping patterns – trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping much more than usual
- lowered energy and lack of motivation
- feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness
- poor concentration and memory problems
- thoughts about suicide.



What is a manic episode?

A manic episode (also called mania) is a period of constant and unusually elevated ('high') or irritable mood and a noticeable increase in energy or activity.

This generally lasts at least one week and is very different from someone's normal state. It leads to a range of difficulties that have a big impact on a person's daily life.

When someone is having a manic episode, they may experience:

- Elevated mood. Feeling euphoric, 'high' or 'on top of the world', or very irritable.
- Less need for sleep. Sleeping very little without feeling tired.
- More energy, activity and drive. Having lots of projects or plans, always being 'on the go'.
- Racing thoughts and rapid speech. Thoughts speeding from topic to topic, speech that's difficult for others to follow.
- Being disinhibited. Engaging in high-risk behaviours that are out

of character, like sexual risk-taking, abusing alcohol or other drugs, or spending large amounts of money.

- Inflated self-esteem. Ranging from uncritical self-confidence to 'grandiose' beliefs (e.g., the person saying they have special powers or talents).
- Psychotic symptoms. E.g., hearing or seeing things that are not real (i.e., hallucinations) or having intensely strong beliefs about something that's not real (i.e., delusions). These usually match the person's elevated mood.

What is a hypomanic episode?

A hypomanic episode is a milder form of mania that lasts for at least four days.

The symptoms are less severe and there are no psychotic symptoms. Hypomanic episodes may feel enjoyable (i.e., more confidence/elevated mood). Some individuals will manage to keep functioning without any significant difficulties, but others will progress to experience a full manic episode.

Getting support

A diagnosis from a health professional, a local general practitioner (GP) or a psychiatrist is important in getting the right treatment. Getting professional treatment early can help to limit the impact of bipolar disorder on the things you want to do in your life. Treatment can also reduce the risk that you will have challenges with your mood in the future.

Your mental health practitioner will work with you and the important people in your life to help you understand your experiences and develop the most appropriate support plan.

A support plan often involves a combination of medication and psychological therapies. Your GP or psychiatrist can help you find a medication that works for you. Psychological therapies can help you to understand your mood patterns, manage difficult thoughts and feelings, and develop a plan to help minimise the impact bipolar disorder has on your life.

These strategies usually include:

- sleeping and eating well
- staying active
- learning to manage stress
- limiting use of alcohol and other drugs
- connecting with trusted friends, family, mob and supportive people in your life
- getting a good balance of rest and activities
- learning to recognise 'warning signs' that you may be becoming unwell.

Types of bipolar disorder

A person with bipolar I disorder will have had at least one episode of mania. Usually the mania is so severe that they will need admission to hospital to keep them safe. They'll usually have had depression at some time as well.

A person with bipolar II disorder will have had at least one episode of hypomania as well as at least one depressive episode. Depressive episodes can be severe and the instability of mood can cause a great amount of disruption to their lives.

A person with cyclothymia (or cyclothymic disorder) experiences changes in mood that are less severe than those in bipolar I or II. Although the symptoms may be less severe, it can have a significant impact on a person's functioning and can be challenging to manage.



If someone is experiencing symptoms, it's important to take them seriously and ensure they access professional support.



Approximately 2 in 100 people experience bipolar disorder sometime during their lives.
(Merikangas KR, 2011)¹

1. Merikangas KR, et al. Prevalence and Correlates of Bipolar Spectrum Disorder in the World Mental Health Survey Initiative. Arch Gen Psychiatry. 2011;68(3):241-51.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)

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understanding psychosis

Psychosis is an experience where a person has difficulties interpreting the real world. They might see or hear things that other people can't or have unusual ideas or beliefs. This can affect their thoughts, feelings and behaviour.

Psychosis is often frightening for the person going through it and misunderstood by those around them. However, it can be treated. Most people who experience psychosis make a good recovery and go on to lead healthy, productive lives.



What are the symptoms of psychosis?

Changed behaviour

Behaving differently from how they usually do. For example, extremely active or having little energy; laughing when things don't seem funny or becoming angry or upset without any obvious reason.

Changed emotions

Feeling strange and cut off from the world; feeling less emotion or showing less emotion than those around them.

Confused thinking

Everyday thoughts can become confused, making sentences unclear or hard to understand. It can be hard to concentrate, follow a conversation or remember things. Thoughts can seem to speed up or slow down.

False beliefs (delusions)

Strong beliefs in things that aren't real to other people. Such as, believing that they're being followed, that someone is trying to harm them, or that they're getting secret messages (e.g., from a TV). This can be very scary for the person.

Hallucinations

Hearing or seeing something that isn't there. Sometimes other senses like touch, smell or taste can also be affected.



These symptoms are different for everyone. They might not be there all the time, can have different causes and can change over time.

What causes psychosis?

Like lots of mental health difficulties, psychosis is caused by a combination of different things. Things like genetics (inherited from parents) and a history of tough times (like trauma and childhood experiences) can make a person more vulnerable to psychosis.

Things people are exposed to in life (or 'stressors') can also feed into psychosis. They include:



Alcohol and other drug use



Grief and loss



Difficult times with family or friends



Problems at school, university, TAFE or work

Where psychosis can occur

Experiencing psychotic symptoms doesn't necessarily mean that someone has a psychotic illness. More than three quarters of psychotic experiences don't progress to an illness.

Many people think that people experiencing psychosis have schizophrenia. But there are lots of other disorders that have psychotic symptoms, including:

- brief psychotic disorder
- schizophrenia
- substance/medication-induced psychotic disorder
- bipolar disorder
- major depression with psychotic features
- delusional disorder.

Because symptoms can change over time, the type of disorder often changes too. Sometimes people are diagnosed with one thing, and then later the diagnosis is changed or removed.

Getting support

Psychosis can be frightening, confusing and disruptive – it's important to know that help is available and with the right support most people get better.

If you think you're experiencing symptoms of psychosis, it's a good idea to seek help as soon as possible.

The earlier you get help, the better the results can be and the quicker your recovery.

General Practitioners (GPs) and clinicians at your local mental health service will be able to provide the help you need.

Recovering from psychosis

The recovery journey is different for everyone, and it can be an ongoing process. It's not just about getting rid of the symptoms – it's about learning to enjoy life while managing the tough times when they happen.

There can be ups and downs during recovery. People can sometimes feel like they're not getting better – it's important to be patient. Recovery takes time, support, and effort.

How is it treated?

Treatments for psychosis usually include:

- education about psychosis
- medicine
- counselling
- support from family, friends, community and/or mob
- practical support, like helping the person get back to studies or work.

What does recovery involve?

Recovery may involve:

- learning how to build and maintain a healthy headspace – things like staying active, connecting with others, sleeping and eating well, and cutting back on alcohol and other drugs
- getting back a sense of control
- learning to manage symptoms so they have less of an impact on day-to-day life
- learning how to have supportive relationships
- going to school, uni, TAFE or work
- learning to be more independent.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au

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understanding disordered eating and eating disorders

Disordered eating is when a person experiences an unhealthy relationship with food or eating.

Disordered eating can include skipping meals, binge eating, or following a strict diet. A person who experiences disordered eating may also try to 'make up' for breaking diets by exercising or vomiting.

Disordered eating habits and behaviours can lead to the development of an eating disorder. They can impact every aspect of a person's life.

We can all experience unhealthy eating habits from time to time.

Unhealthy eating habits can come and go, but for some people, they can become a real problem. These behaviours, or extreme concerns about weight or how our body looks, are a sign that it's time to seek support.

Disordered eating often begins with dieting or over-exercising, but lots of other factors can increase the risk that this may develop into an eating disorder.

These include:

- **individual factors** – such as believing you're not good enough, wanting to do things perfectly all the time, or having an unrealistic perception of what their body looks like or should look like
- **family factors** – like a family history of eating disorders
- **outside factors** – like the influence of the media and social pressures to look a certain way
- **life factors** – certain stressors like exams, work, relationships and feeling overwhelmed.

Eating disorders are a serious health issue, damaging and at times even life-threatening. If you're having problems with disordered eating or body image, it's important to seek professional support. The sooner you ask for help, the faster your recovery will be.

What are the symptoms and warning signs?

The most common signs of disordered eating are:

Changes in behaviour

- using food as a way to manage or express emotions
- repetitive or obsessive dieting
- binge eating.

Changes in thoughts and feelings

- thinking and talking about food, weight and body appearance a lot of the time
- feeling out of control in relation to eating patterns
- worrying about places that involve food, eating, eating in front of others
- preoccupation with exercise or body building
- feeling guilt and or shame about eating patterns
- fearing gaining weight
- difficulty concentrating.

Changes in the body

- often feeling tired and low in energy.



People will experience these symptoms differently. It's important to seek professional support to make sense of them. Talking to a GP (General Practitioner) or someone that you trust – like a trusted family member, friend, Elder, or counsellor – can help.



Common types of eating disorders

An eating disorder is a diagnosed type of disordered eating. People with any body type can experience eating disorders. Eating disorders don't always affect body weight.

Anorexia nervosa

Anorexia nervosa is when a person experiences all of the following:

- getting less energy (food) than their body requires to maintain health
- having an intense fear of gaining weight
- seeing their body size or shape in a distorted and disturbed way.

People experiencing anorexia nervosa also have weight loss and/or are underweight.

There are two types of anorexia nervosa:

- **restrictive** – not eating enough and/or exercising a lot more than food intake
- **binge-purge** – eating (sometimes to excess) and then through some method removing that food (e.g., vomiting or laxatives).

Many people may change between these types.

Bulimia nervosa

Bulimia nervosa involves a cycle of binge eating (eating a large amount of food quickly, in a way that feels uncontrolled), followed by actions to get rid of the food eaten.

People experiencing bulimia nervosa usually have strong feelings of distress, guilt and shame about these experiences, and are often very critical of their body.

Binge eating disorder

Binge eating disorder involves repeated episodes of binge eating, often with a sense of loss of control while eating.

Avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder

A person may avoid eating certain foods based on the sensory characteristics such as the smell, appearance or texture. This can lead to issues with nutrition and physical health.

Other specific feeding or eating disorders

An eating disorder that significantly impacts a person's life but doesn't meet the full criteria for one of the other types of eating disorders.

Self-help tips to support recovery

Alongside professional help, if you think you may be developing signs of unhealthy eating habits, there are many things that you can do to help get on top of things.

Seek support from people you trust

Knowing that you're not alone on your recovery journey can be really powerful. Reach out for support from a trusted friend, family member, Elder, school counsellor, or others who have experienced an eating disorder in online support groups, like The Butterfly Foundation and the InsideOut Institute.

Try to be open about your feelings

These might include feelings of anger, fear, exhaustion, guilt, shame – they're all part of being human. Being open and honest about these feelings with supportive people can help to remind you that you're not alone, and to find self-acceptance.

Reconnect with who you are

Disordered eating can be tough and at times you might forget there is more to you than these challenges. Reconnecting with the other parts of you can help to build up your identity 'outside' of the disorder.

Be kind to yourself

Recovery is a journey. It can take some time and it can feel exhausting, so try not to be hard on yourself if things aren't going smoothly. Keep a journal to record your achievements and successes along the way. When you hit a rough patch, looking back at this journal can help keep your energy and motivation up.

Celebrate the wins that you have, even if they're small. Show yourself a lot of love and pride throughout these wins.

For more info about eating disorders visit The Butterfly Foundation or the InsideOut Institute. butterfly.org.au or insideoutinstitute.org.au

Getting support

What to do if you think you experience disordered eating

Many people with disordered eating may feel that their experiences aren't bad enough, or they aren't 'thin enough' to need professional help.

No matter what a person weighs or how much or little they eat, anybody experiencing unhealthy eating patterns and distress about how they look should seek professional support.

It's a good idea to try to find help sooner rather than later. The earlier you get support, the quicker you can start recovering.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au

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alcohol

A lot of people don't see alcohol as a drug, but it's the most used and easily accessible drug in Australia.



Alcohol is a depressant which means that it slows down the brain – it dulls the senses and affects the way you think, feel and act.

Alcohol and peer pressure

It's normal to want to be part of a group and often drinking can be a big part of socialising. But if you don't want to drink, or have 'just one more', then that choice is yours. Deciding to drink alcohol should be on your terms.

If you choose to drink, it's important to get informed and drink as safely as possible.

It is important to remember that there is no safe way to use alcohol and it can impact on your developing brain and body.



What does alcohol do?

As a general rule, alcohol can make you feel more confident and relaxed, slow down your reflexes and affect your balance and coordination.

Drinking too much can cause headaches, dizziness, nausea and vomiting. In some cases, people can pass out and may not remember what happened. They may do risky things that they wouldn't do while sober.

How alcohol makes you feel depends on lots of things, like:

- your weight
- your health
- how regularly you drink
- how much you drink
- the strength of the drink
- what kind of mood you're in
- who you're drinking with.

The effects of alcohol can last for hours, even overnight, especially if you have drunk a lot. When it wears off you may feel tired, thirsty, headachy and sick. This usually won't last longer than a day.



Alcohol and mental health

Alcohol can have a big impact on our mental health. It's a depressant, so it slows your body down and changes the chemical makeup in your brain.

For example, it can change your:

- mood
- energy levels
- sleeping patterns
- concentration
- memory.

Alcohol can also reduce inhibitions and impact on decision making. This can lead us to making decisions that we wouldn't normally make while sober.

It's also linked with:

- increased risk-taking
- increased aggression
- unsafe sex practices
- self harm and suicide in people who may already be going through a tough time
- binge drinking (drinking a lot in one session).

People who are experiencing a mental health difficulty may use alcohol to try and manage tough times or lift their mood. This might feel helpful in the short term however it can end up making us feel worse, and make things harder in the long run.

Alcohol and physical health

Alcohol can impact on your physical health in a number of ways.

Short term effects include:

- difficulty sleeping
- lower immunity
- trouble concentrating
- difficulty getting motivated.

Long term alcohol use can cause additional problems like:

- high blood pressure
- heart disease
- brain damage
- liver disease as well as different kinds of cancers.



If you're pregnant, drinking alcohol can lead to serious health problems for you and your baby.

staying safer

If you're going to drink alcohol, safer tips for you and your friends include:

- setting a limit and sticking to it (there are apps that can help you)
- pre-arranging how you'll get home
- avoiding drinking alone
- eating before and while you're drinking
- pacing yourself – drink water between alcoholic drinks
- avoiding rounds/shouts
- avoiding mixing alcohol with other drugs (prescription or illegal)
- looking out for each other; don't leave anyone alone.



Drink spiking: stay safe by always keeping an eye on your drink and not accepting any pre-opened drinks.

Benefits to reducing or stopping

There are many benefits that can come from reducing or stopping alcohol use. These may include:

- more energy
- better sleep
- saving money
- better physical health
- improved mood
- improved engagement with work and study
- improved relationships.



Getting support

It can be tricky giving up drinking if you've been doing it for a long time and are dependent because your body has to get used to going without it. You might experience withdrawal symptoms including sweating, feeling sick, anxiety, irritability, problems sleeping, hallucinations, tremors and even seizures. Because of this, it's a good idea to speak to a GP to discuss the safest way to cut back on your drinking.

For further information on cutting back on alcohol, or for safer partying tips, please see our website.

If you're worried about your alcohol use, it's time to reach out to a trusted friend, family member, Elder, teacher, counsellor, or a health service.



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understanding anger

Everyone feels angry sometimes and feeling anger is OK. It can help get us through tough situations, help us understand ourselves better and can motivate us to change things we don't like about our life.

Anger can become a problem when it begins to impact a person's daily life and causes them to react in a way that might hurt themselves or those around them (physically or emotionally).

If you feel angry a lot or have trouble controlling or expressing your anger, there are lots of things you can do to help manage this in a healthy way.

Anger versus aggression

Anger can sometimes lead to people being aggressive or violent (e.g., physically, verbally) but they're not the same. Anger is a feeling, but aggression and violence are actions, and it's these actions that can lead to problems.



Anger can sometimes feel intense and overwhelming, but it doesn't necessarily lead to violent or aggressive behaviour.

Why might I feel angry?

Anger can be our way of expressing or responding to a range of other feelings like:

- frustration
- embarrassment
- guilt or shame
- jealousy
- grief and loss
- hurt or sadness
- feeling unable to control a situation
- feeling threatened or frightened
- feeling unfairly treated
- feeling misunderstood or not listened to
- feeling a loss of connection to family, community or country.

Signs anger might be a problem include:

- feeling angry a lot of the time
- behaving aggressively/violently (verbally, physically)
- having trouble expressing anger
- feeling sad or upset because of getting angry
- using alcohol or other drugs to manage anger
- using aggression to get people to do something
- withdrawing from people or situations
- bottling things up
- regretting the things you did or said when you were angry.





What else might be going on?

Difficulties with anger can be a sign that someone might be experiencing sadness, depression, isolation, discrimination, or another mental health difficulty.

Getting support

There are plenty of ways to manage anger so that it doesn't get in the way of your daily life or impact other people.

Check out the headspace website for tips on how to look after your mental health and to learn more about managing tough times.

If you've tried some of these strategies for some time without improving, it's time to reach out to a trusted friend, family member, Elder, teacher, counsellor, or a health service.

So what can I do to manage my anger in a healthy way?

Understand your angry triggers and signs

Triggers

Think about what normally triggers your anger. It might be possible to avoid these situations, react differently when they happen, or you could let others know your triggers so they can help.

Signs

These might be things like feeling hot, fists or teeth clenching, tightening in the chest, faster heartbeat.

Understand why you're feeling angry

Ask yourself questions like:

- Did someone do or say something that upset me?
- What other feelings are happening for me?
- Does the situation bring up bad memories?
- Try drawing your answers if that's better for you.

calm your reactions down

- slow your breathing – take deep breaths
- take a break and leave the situation
- use distractions – e.g., count slowly to 10, try push-ups or bounce a ball
- get into nature – pay attention to what you see, hear, smell and touch
- talk with someone you trust.

Explore your solutions

Wait until you're feeling calm and safe and think of some other ways you can express your anger.

Ask yourself questions like:

- How can I explain the situation in a calm way?
- What might I suggest to a friend if they asked me for help in this situation?
- What have I seen other people do that helps them deal with anger?

Reach out to someone you trust

Your family and friends, a teacher or coach, your mob or Elders, might have ideas about how you can express your anger in healthy ways. Talking with them can be a great place to start.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au

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understanding loneliness

We can all feel lonely at different points in our lives. Loneliness is a feeling and like all feelings, it's trying to tell us something.

Feeling lonely lets us know that we aren't feeling meaningfully connected enough with other people. It's trying to motivate us to do something different.

This doesn't necessarily mean having lots of people to hang out with, it's about meaningful connections – feeling understood and supported.

For some people, loneliness can feel overwhelming and can lead to feeling flat, sad and worried. Some people who experience loneliness might also experience anxiety or depression.

It's important to know that loneliness is not always the same as being alone. Some people can have little contact with others and not feel lonely at all, and some people who have many friends can feel lonely. Everyone is different.



When might you feel lonely?

Feeling lonely can happen at any time. Big life changes such as relationship break-ups, the death of someone close to us, or moving somewhere new can increase the likelihood of us feeling lonely.

Other things might include:

- starting new jobs, school, TAFE or uni
- living alone
- not feeling understood by others
- having little contact with others.



It can be hard to admit that we're feeling lonely. We might feel ashamed, embarrassed, or we might think it's our fault, but it's really common – we all feel lonely sometimes.



Things you can do when you're feeling lonely

There are many things we can do to support ourselves that can help us connect with others:

Acknowledge that you're feeling lonely

It's trying to encourage you to do something new. Understanding our emotions is an important step in trying something different.

Create a routine

Include meaningful and enjoyable activities. Doing stuff is really important for our mental health and wellbeing.

Be kind to yourself

Self-compassion helps gives us the strength to continue when we're faced with life's challenges.

Some places to look

Meet Up (www.meetup.com) has many groups both online and in-person; Facebook has online communities that you might be interested in; or you can create your own.

headspace also hosts weekly Peer Support Chats discussions for young people by young people. See our website for more info.



Create connections

Connecting with others is an important part of being human. Healthy relationships can support us, give us a sense of belonging and improve our mental health and wellbeing.

Putting ourselves out there can feel scary though, but if we want things to change, we need to support ourselves and take action. When we face the things that challenge us, we start to build skills and gain confidence in our ability to cope.

Grow a relationship

Friendships can take time and effort to grow. Reach out to someone you have something in common with, invite them out and base the activity around whatever you have in common.

Join a group

Joining a group can help you meet new people that share your interests. There are many different types of groups you can join. These come in lots of shapes and forms. Some ideas you might explore include sporting, community, cultural, spiritual, recreational, creative and even online groups. Consider what you like doing, or try something new, and see if there's a group you can join.

Volunteer

Volunteering can help us meet new people and give us a sense of purpose. Volunteering Australia (www.volunteeringAustralia.org) is a national body that helps match you with a volunteering opportunity.



54%
Approximately one in two young people feel a sense of loneliness. (headspace 2020)¹.

Look after yourself

No matter what's going on, it's a good idea to be kind to yourself and practice self-care. These are things like sleeping well, eating well, limit alcohol and other drugs, building skills for tough times and staying active.

Getting support

Feelings of loneliness can come and go, but if we feel it constantly or it's affecting our ability to do things, it can be a sign that we need extra support. Reach out to a trusted friend, family member, Elder, teacher, counsellor, or a health service for support.

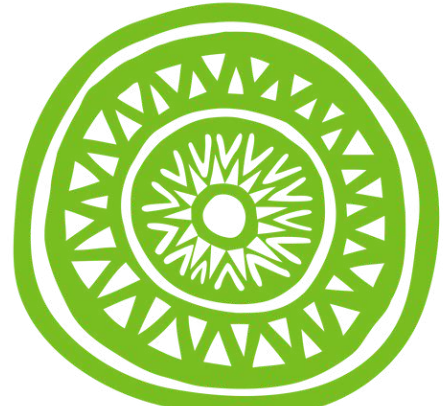
Check out our website for other tips on looking after your mental health and wellbeing – headspace.org.au/tips

1. headspace. Loneliness over time: headspace National Youth Mental Health Survey 2020 [Internet]. 2020. Available from: https://headspace.org.au/assets/HSP10869-Loneliness-Report_FA01.pdf



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aboriginal & torres strait islander

1. how to help a friend
2. not feeling too deadly?
3. where can I go for extra support?
4. mental health
5. stress and pressure
6. strong and healthy relationships
7. alcohol and drugs



How to help a friend

At some time, somebody in your life is going to need help. Maybe they will ask or maybe they won't. Keep track of your friends and your family and check in with them whenever you can. You might notice little things that actually mean a lot.

what should I look out for?

Some of the things to look out for are people:

- not doing the things you know they enjoy anymore
- hiding away a lot more than is usual for them
- starting to use alcohol and other drugs more often
- not acting the way they normally do
- seeming disconnected or fighting with mob.

Keep an eye on what people are posting online. If this seems different then there is probably something up.

how can I help?

If someone seems to be experiencing difficulties and you are feeling OK, the best thing you can do is to ask them if they are doing OK and listen while they yarn up to you.

Try not to bombard them with your opinions or advice and don't feel like you have to solve all their problems. It's amazing how healing it can be to simply be listened to.

TAKE

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STEP

need extra support?

A time might come when someone tells you something that makes you worry — maybe for their safety or others. If this happens it is important that you yarn to:

- a teacher
- a health worker
- a counsellor
- an adult you trust.

Don't feel shame about doing this because you could save them or others from pain and heartache.

There are a lot of people out there who are trained in helping people through life's twists and turns and if you know of a solid counsellor or service, you might help your mate or family member get in touch with them.

There are lots of support groups around that you could reach out to for support. Groups such as men's, women's and social groups.

Call 1800 650 890 or visit headspace.org.au/takeastep

If you, or someone you care about, are in crisis **call triple zero (000)**.

You can also go to your local hospital emergency department.

Remember to stay with the person until they are able to access professional support.

If you're feeling overwhelmed and need to speak with someone now, contact:

Lifeline on 13 11 14

Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467

(if you're aged 15 years or older).

**TAKE
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STEP**

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Gee, G., Dudgeon, P., Schultz, C., Hart, A. & Kerrie, K. (2014). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Emotional Wellbeing. In P. Dudgeon, H. Milroy, & R. Walker (Eds.), *Working together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practice* (2nd Ed.) (pp. 55-68). Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.



Not feeling too deadly?

Nobody is 100% all the time and that's OK. When you are as strong and deadly in as many parts of your life as possible, then you're a stronger you for you, your family, your friends and your community. There is nothing selfish about taking the time to care for yourself.

what might you notice?

Sometimes it can be hard to notice that we might not be feeling 100%. That is normal. Here are some signs to look out for that we might need to pay a little attention to our wellbeing.

If you're not 100% you might notice:

- your mind feels stressed a lot of the time, tired for no reason, flat or sad, or maybe nervous
- your body feels heavy, tired or restless
- you're sleeping less or tired all the time
- you feel disconnected from loved ones
- you're finding it hard to switch off from your phone and social media
- you're using alcohol and other drugs more
- changes in your work or study habits.

These might be impacting on your feelings of purpose, identity and connection to country, culture and spirit.

If you've noticed any of these, take some time to check out these tips to help your social and emotional wellbeing.

TAKE

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STEP

what to do if you are having a tough time

Sometimes we might need a bit of extra support. Below are some suggestions that can help you look after your social and emotional wellbeing and build a stronger you.

strong body

- Recognise when you might need to look after your body.
- Some days it can feel tough and hard to move your body. On these days take a small step and see where it takes you. Often starting can be the hardest part.
- When we are feeling overwhelmed, eating nutritious foods and drinking enough water might be hard. Try to eat some fresh foods and remember to drink plenty of water. This will help keep your body strong.
- Try to limit your use of alcohol and other drugs. They can be harmful in the longer term.
- Learn more about your strong body [here](#).

strong culture

- Recognising our cultures are the oldest ongoing cultures in the world has power.
- Explore the places, people and activities that make you feel dead. Allow yourself to connect with these as much as possible.
- Learn more about your strong culture [here](#).

strong identity

- When you are feeling a bit lost it can be important to sit somewhere quiet, close your eyes and allow yourself to dream about who you are.
- Learn more about your strong identity [here](#).

strong mind

- Recognise when you might be going over and over things from the past or getting caught up worrying about the future.
- You can break this cycle by having a yarn with others.
- You might try some relaxation strategies to help keep your mind strong.
- Learn more about your strong mind [here](#).

strong purpose

- Setting goals is a great way to start building a sense of purpose. Setting, striving for and achieving your goals means you are dreaming of your future each day.
- Learn more about your strong purpose [here](#).

strong place

- Connecting to your strong place can help you feel stable when things seem unsettled.
- Physically being on or in your strong place is one of the best things you can do to help you feel better.
- Getting back on country, returning to your hometown, even sitting in your room, if that is your safe place, can all be really helpful to your wellbeing.
- If your strong place is far away, think about how you might be able to recreate or reflect on your safe place wherever you are. Get creative and explore different ways to do this.
- Learn more about your strong place [here](#).

strong relationships

- Be respectful, kind, loving, and honest to others.
- Explore different ways of communicating to help your relationships.
- Learn more about your strong relationships [here](#).

strong spirit

- Celebrate that you are unique, beautiful and important. This can be hard to do. Start by making a note of the things you are grateful for each day. It doesn't matter how small they might seem.
- Explore the places, people and activities that make you feel dead. Allow yourself to connect with these as much as possible.
- Write about or draw the things you're grateful for.
- Learn more about your strong spirit [here](#).

Want to learn more?
Visit headspace.org.au/takeastep

TAKE

a

STEP

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Where can I go for extra support?

Sometimes we all need some extra support. It's OK to ask for help. Knowing when and how to ask for this help can be hard.

what should I look out for?

Some of the things that might mean it's important to reach out for help now are:

- you're not doing the things you enjoy anymore
- you're hiding away a lot more
- you've started to use alcohol and other drugs more
- you're having a hard time controlling anger
- you might be feeling lost or sad.

what can I do?

Have a look at the Take a Step website for some tips and tricks for a stronger you that might be helpful. You might take a look at the Stronger You wheel activity.

who can I ask for extra support?

Having a yarn to someone you trust can be helpful. This might include:

- a teacher
- a health worker
- an adult you trust.

You might ask a friend to help you to reach out to these people.

There are a lot of people out there who are trained in helping people go through life's twists and turns and if you know of a solid counsellor or service, you might get in touch with them to help support you.

TAKE

a

STEP

need extra support?

Sometimes we might need extra support. Different parts of our strong self can find support in different ways. Do you need some extra support for:

your strong body?

- Reach out to a local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander health service.
- Contact your local GP.
- Contact headspace to speak with someone.

your strong culture?

- Reach out to a respected Elder or youth leader in your town.
- You might visit a local cultural centre.
- Explore your culture on the internet.

your strong identity?

- Reach out to a trusted adult.
- Yarn with an Elder.
- Speak with your teacher, school counsellor, mentor or sports coach.

your strong mind?

- Contact your school counsellor.
- If your workplace has an employee assistance program (EAP) give them a try.
- Your local health service might have counsellors available.
- For immediate crisis support you can contact Lifeline on 13 11 44. If you don't have access to a phone, you might ask your school counsellor or family and friends to use their phone.
- Contact headspace to speak with someone.

your strong purpose?

- Set goals.
- Yarn with Elders, mentors, teachers, school counsellors, or your work's employee assistance program (EAP).
- headspace or eheadspace are available to speak to and give good advice.

your strong place?

- Take a moment to think about where you are and where you've come from.
- Learn from family about where your mob are from and where they have felt connected.
- Contact Link-Up to help discover your mob's places.
- Have a yarn with an Elder, counsellor, and/or spiritual healer.

your strong relationships?

- Yarn with someone you trust like family or friends.
- You might try having a yarn with a counsellor at your local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander health service, school counsellor or chaplain, or employee assistance program (EAP).
- You might want to speak with headspace.

your strong spirit?

- Yarn with your local Elders.
- Connect with a leader in your faith system.
- Find ways to connect to nature.
- Try visualisation or relaxation techniques.
- You can always contact headspace to help figure out what works best for your strong spirit.

Want to learn more? Visit headspace.org.au/takeastep

TAKE

a

STEP

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GOT A LOT GOING ON?

NO SHAME IN TALKING IT OUT



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MENTAL HEALTH IS LIKE A TREE

To stay strong and healthy it needs looking after. You need to take care of the roots of the tree for it to grow tall and stand strong.



SPIRITUAL

TRITES CULTURE ELDERS
IDENTITY LANGUAGE
COUNTRY CEREMONY PRIDE
BELIEFS LANGUAGE TOTEMS
ABORIGINALITY TRADITION
SACRED DREAMING LORE

MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL

HEALTHY HEADSPACE
POSITIVE THINKING RESILIENCE
FEELING DEADLY STRONG
SUPPORT THOUGHTS
HEALING FEELINGS

FAMILY

FRIENDS
AUNTIES AND UNCLES
KINSHIP PARENTS
BELONGING SUPPORT
SAFE PLACE MOB
CLAN ROLE MODELS

PHYSICAL

HEALTHY BODY
EXERCISE GOOD SLEEP
SPORT GOOD TUCKER
HEALTHY LIFESTYLE
LOOKING DEADLY DANCE
FISHING HUNTING

Adapted from Menzies School of Health Research – Aboriginal and Islander Mental Health Initiative.

YOU MIGHT NOTICE CHANGES

When we've got a lot going on we can feel sad, weak, tired, stressed and angry. Everybody has these feelings when life is tough, but when these feelings go on for a long time it can weaken our body, mind and spirit. When this happens, there are some changes you might notice, like:

- Feeling sad inside and no interest in doing things
- Feeling like everything is an effort
- Wanting to be alone
- Not eating good tucker
- Not being able to sleep
- Feeling nervous or jumpy
- Feeling guilt or shame
- Being so sad nothing can cheer you up
- Crying and you don't know why
- Having trouble focusing or remembering things
- Having too much alcohol, gunja/yandi and other drugs
- Having bad thoughts or thinking of dying



YOU CAN KEEP YOURSELF STRONG BY

- Yarn with friends and family about what's going on
- Getting enough sleep
- Eating good, healthy tucker
- Staying connected with family and friends who give you strength and support
- Practicing culture through local totems and stories
- Spend time with local Elders to learn history, go on country, and learn art and crafts
- Reconnecting with country by going camping, hunting, fishing, swimming or surfing
- Taking time out for yourself to do things you enjoy like a hot bath, bush walk or drawing
- Making deadly choices and good changes
- Setting yourself goals
- Staying connected to your physical body by playing sports, music or dancing

Having ways to practice culture, language, and spiritual beliefs can make you feel proud and keep your spirit strong and your mind positive and resilient. Sometimes your community isn't on traditional country but you can still get involved in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture by sharing stories with local Elders and discovering local history.



LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

If you have noticed a change in yourself or a friend, it can be helpful to yarn with someone.



AGED 12-25? HOW HEADSPACE CAN HELP

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headspace has centres where you can yarn to someone face-to-face, or you can contact our online and telephone support service, eheadspace.org.au or 1800 650 890. Remember, if you or a friend have a big worry and need urgent medical help, you need to call 000 straight away.

FIND OUT MORE AT WWW.YARNSAFE.ORG.AU



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GOT A LOT GOING ON?

NO SHAME IN TALKING IT OUT



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STRESS AND PRESSURE

Stress can come from many things and cause all sorts of problems.



STRESS CAN COME FROM

FEELING DISCONNECTED
RELATIONSHIPS **MONEY**
YOUR BODY **JOBS** SORRY BUSINESS
BULLYING **GRIEF** **SCHOOL**
UNIVERSITY DRUGS AND ALCOHOL
COMMUNITY JUDGEMENT
TRYING TO MEET YOUR OWN EXPECTATIONS RACISM
RESPONSIBILITY TO FAMILY FIGHTING WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS
DISCRIMINATION **INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA**
FAMILY EXPECTATIONS HAVING TO SUPPORT YOUR MOB
BRINGING HOME MONEY TO SUPPORT THE FAMILY **WORK**
DEALING WITH OTHER PEOPLE'S PROBLEMS

STRESS CAN CAUSE

BAD THOUGHTS
FEELING SAD INSIDE **FEELING LONELY**
BLAMING YOURSELF FOR THINGS EVEN IF IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT
WANTING TO BE ALONE ALL THE TIME
STAYING AWAY FROM MOB
FEELING LIKE EVERYTHING IS A HASSLE
FAMILY CONFLICTS **QUICK TO GET WILD**
FEELING TIRED AND FED UP
THINKING THE WORLD IS AGAINST YOU
FEELING LIKE NO ONE UNDERSTANDS
BEING UNABLE TO THINK PROPERLY OR MAKE GOOD CHOICES

BE A YOUNG LEADER

Find good ways to cope when feeling stressed out and show your mob that it's ok to yarn to someone when you have lots of stress and pressure. There's no shame in talking it out.



WORRY ME NOT

Everyone has worries in their life but it becomes a problem when your worrying goes on for a long time. It's important to look after yourself so you can overcome your worries and feel strong in your mind, body, spirit and culture.



SPIRITUAL

VISIT COUNTRY
RIVER, BUSH OR
SOMEWHERE PEACEFUL
RELAX AND CHILL
SIT UNDER A TREE TO
BE WITH NATURE

MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL

WATCH MOVIES THAT
MAKE YOU LAUGH
DRAW AND PAINT
WRITE POEMS, SONG LYRICS
OR THOUGHTS IN A DIARY

FAMILY

YARN WITH YOUR MOB
CHILL WITH YOUR FRIENDS
STAY INVOLVED WITH
FAMILY, FRIENDS,
COMMUNITY
MOB AND CULTURE

PHYSICAL

**PRACTICE BREATHING
AND RELAXATION EXERCISES**
LISTEN AND SING ALONG TO MUSIC
AVOID ALCOHOL AND DRUGS
TRY TO GET MORE SLEEP
BE ACTIVE AND DO PHYSICAL ACTIVITY
EAT GOOD TUCKER

Adapted from Menzies School of Health Research – Aboriginal and Islander Mental Health Initiative.

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

If you have noticed a change in yourself or a friend, it can be helpful to yarn with someone:



AGED
12-25?

HOW HEADSPACE CAN HELP

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GOT A LOT GOING ON?

NO SHAME IN TALKING IT OUT



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STRONG AND HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Good relationships can make you feel happy and confident. They can help get you through tough times. It's deadly to share, care, laugh and love with your mob and bond over culture, community, kinship and family.



FAMILY

KINSHIP COUSINS
SAFE PLACE
ROLE MODELS SUPPORT
CLAN PARENTS
AUNTIES AND UNCLES
BROTHERS AND SISTERS

PARTNERS

LOVE TRUST
TRUTH HONEST
RESPECT
UNDERSTANDING
CARING **KIND**
LOYAL STRONG

MOBS

FRIENDS SPORTS TEAM
ELDERS SCHOOL
MATES MENTORS
WORK PEERS
YOUTH GROUPS COMMUNITY
CULTURE GROUPS

MAINTAINING FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Family relationships can sometimes break down because of many reasons. Disagreements, arguments and fights with family can leave you feeling down.

Maintaining your relationship with your family and keeping it strong can be really important in helping you feel deadly. Relationships with family can sometimes be tough, so there's no shame in talking to someone you can trust about what's going on and how to get things back on track.



SIGNS OF AN UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR PARTNER

POSSESSIVENESS – when they're checking up on you all the time and controlling where you go and who you see.

JEALOUSY – when they accuse you of cheating, keep you from seeing your mob or talking to other people.

PUT DOWNS – when they run you down, shame you up and say stuff that makes you feel like you're no good.

THREATS – when they make threats that they will hurt you, your mob or your friends. Yelling, sulking and breaking things are forms of abuse.

PHYSICAL OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE – shoving, hitting, forcing you to have sex or do things you don't want to do.

When relationships aren't good, and close friendships and relationships break down, it can be really hard to deal with. You may notice that you feel down, have less motivation to do things, have trouble sleeping or lose your appetite.

Maintaining friendships and keeping them strong is not always easy. Some friends make you laugh, some are always there for you, some have been around for as long as you can remember.

Different friendships will keep you happy and strong in different parts of your life. Friendships will change over time and sometimes they can turn into unhealthy relationships. Not all friends are good for you and it's important to figure out which ones are strong and which ones you are better off without.



LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

If you're having worries about a friendship or relationship, it can be helpful to talk to the person about it or yarn with someone that you trust.



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GOT A LOT GOING ON?

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ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

Drugs and alcohol can make you feel good for a little while, but in the long run will make you feel much worse. Drugs and alcohol can also weaken your spirit and your connection with family, community and culture.

It's important to stay safe. These are some signs of when drinking or drug use could be becoming a problem.



STOP DOING THINGS NOT EATING EATING TOO MUCH FEELING ANGRY OR IRRITABLE STAYING IN BED
UNUSUAL SADNESS OVER-SLEEPING FIGHTING WITH FAMILY CAN'T SETTLE DOWN SAD FEELINGS
HAVING NO MONEY FOR FOOD LACK OF ENERGY HAVING TROUBLE SLEEPING FIGHTING WITH FRIENDS
NO MOTIVATION CAUSING FRIENDS AND FAMILY TO WORRY FEELING GUILTY DARK THOUGHTS CAN'T CONCENTRATE
LOSING INTEREST IN THINGS THAT YOU USE TO ENJOY FEELING LIKE YOU CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT IT FEELING BAD
RISKY ACTIVITIES YOU WOULD USUALLY AVOID **STRESSED OUT**

ALCOHOL

Alcohol is stuff like beer, cider, wine, spirits or homebrew but you might know it as grog, charge, booze, drink or piss. Alcohol dulls the senses and affects the way you think, feel and act. For most people, alcohol will relax you, slow down your reflexes and affect your balance and coordination. When you're feeling down, alcohol can make you feel even sadder or more angry.

YARNDI, GUNJA

Yarndi or gunja is also known as cannabis, marijuana, grass, pot, dope and weed. Yarndi can change your mood and slow down thinking, feeling, movements, memory and concentration. After using yarndi, you might find it difficult to think straight, remember things and solve problems. In the long term, yarndi can make you feel less motivated and feel worse if you are feeling down.

ICE (CRYSTAL METH)

Ice can be called crystal meth, amphetamines, shabu, and it is the strongest form of speed. These drugs speed you up and make you have lots of energy. They can also make you feel invincible, and this can lead you to do unsafe things that you wouldn't normally do like have unsafe sex or drive dangerously. It can make you lose your appetite, make you sleep less and run you down. Ice might also make you feel worried or suspicious or aggressive. Some people might see or hear things that aren't there.

STAY SAFE

There is no safe level of drug and grog use. Use of any drug always carries some risk – even prescribed medications can cause unwanted side effects. If you choose to use drugs or alcohol here's some ways to stay safe;

- Sip on your drink, don't hook into it
- Take a little bit of the drug first to see how strong it is
- Don't mix your drugs. It can be very dangerous
- Use clean drug utensils
- Don't drive - keep enough money for a cab or organise a lift with someone you trust
- Make sure you have a feed before you start drinking or using drugs and drink lots of water
- It's not safe to drink and use drugs while pregnant
- Avoid drinking or using drugs if you have school, university or work the next day
- Try drinking out of bottles with lids (safe from spiking)
- Look out for your mates
- Look after your health- remember to rest, eat well, sleep and take time out from drugs
- Call an ambulance (000) if things get bad

STAY STRONG & HEALTHY



GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP
AND EATING GOOD
TUCKER

STAYING CONNECTED TO
YOUR PHYSICAL BODY BY
PLAYING SPORTS, MUSIC
OR DANCING

RECONNECTING WITH COUNTRY
BY HUNTING, CAMPING,
FISHING, OR SWIMMING

PRACTICING CULTURE WITH
LOCAL TOTEMS AND STORIES
SPENDING TIME WITH LOCAL ELDERS
TO LEARN STORIES, GO ON COUNTRY
AND LEARN ART AND CRAFTS

STAYING CONNECTED WITH FAMILY
AND FRIENDS WHO GIVE YOU
STRENGTH AND SUPPORT

MAKING DEADLY CHOICES
AND GOOD CHANGES
TAKING TIME OUT FOR YOURSELF TO DO
THINGS YOU ENJOY LIKE A HOT BATH,
BUSH WALK OR DRAWING

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

If you are worried about yours or a friends drug / alcohol use, it can be helpful to yarn with someone you trust.



AGED 12-25? HOW HEADSPACE CAN HELP

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family & friends

1. partners in parenting
2. an overview of mental health for family and friends
3. starting a conversation with a young person about mental health
4. supporting a young person after a natural disaster
5. maintaining a health headspace during the bushfire season - supporting your young person
6. support for families: to help young people who are exploring their identity
7. responding to family conflict
8. support for families: to help young people on social media
9. support for families: to help young people navigate relationships
10. support for families: helping young people face uncertainty

sign up for Partners in Parenting, our online parenting program

Partners in Parenting is an evidence-based online program designed to help build your skills and confidence in supporting your high school-aged young person's mental health and wellbeing.



The program also covers general parenting challenges, such as communication, managing strong emotions, boundaries, conflicts and staying involved in your high school-aged young person's life while they navigate their independence.



There are 10 interactive online modules to explore and you can complete them in any order and at your own time and pace. Each one will only take around 15 to 25 minutes.

Setting up a free online headspace account is quick, easy and has loads of benefits.



Sign up today!

You can access Partners in Parenting via your headspace online account. If you don't have a headspace account yet, you'll first need to create one. Once you have an account, you can access the program via 'Your interactive tools'.



Visit headspace.org.au/online-and-phone-support/partners-in-parenting/ to find out more and sign up today.

A collaboration between:



MONASH
University



headspace
National Youth Mental Health Foundation



**Partners in
Parenting**



an overview of mental health for family and friends

Good mental health allows us to live life in a positive and meaningful way. It helps us to work or study to our full potential, cope with day-to-day life stresses and be involved in the community.

When a young person experiences good mental health, it helps them be:

- resilient
- flexible
- adaptable
- socially connected.



Feeling down, tense, angry, anxious or moody are all normal emotions, but when these feelings persist for at least a few weeks, or begin to interfere with daily life, they may be part of a mental health concern.

Changes in young people

The journey from childhood to adulthood is full of physical, social, emotional and behavioural changes. With so much happening, it can be difficult to know the difference between normal behaviour such as occasional moodiness and irritability, and an emerging mental health concern. If a young person shows signs of developing a mental health concern it's important they're supported by their family, friends and health professionals early on.

What affects a young person's mental health?

There is no one cause for mental health concerns. Research tells us that a number of overlapping factors may increase the risk of a young person developing a mental health concern, such as:

- biological factors – family history of mental health concerns
- adverse early life experiences – abuse, neglect, death or significant loss or trauma
- individual psychological factors – self-esteem, perfectionism, coping skills or thinking style
- current circumstances – stress from work or studies, money issues, difficult personal relationships, challenges within the family
- serious illness or physical injury
- alcohol and other drugs use and experimentation.

Signs to look out for

Family and friends can often tell when something is not quite right – they may notice the way their young person expresses themselves is different, or other changes in their behaviour.

Here are some common signs that might suggest your young person needs further support.

These include new, noticeable and persistent changes lasting at least a few weeks, such as:

- withdrawing from or not enjoying things they usually do
- changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- isolating themselves and spending more time alone than normal
- being easily irritated or angry for no apparent reason
- declining performance in school, TAFE, uni or work
- loss of energy
- experiencing difficulties with their concentration
- an increase in risk taking behaviour, e.g., using alcohol and /or other drugs, dangerous driving, unprotected sexual activity
- being unusually stressed, worried, down or crying for no apparent reason
- expressing negative, distressing, bizarre or unusual thoughts.



How to support your young person

Reach out to your young person at a time when everyone seems calm to:

- talk openly and honestly
- let them know you're concerned and ask what they need from you
- show empathy and try to understand their perspective
- avoid judgement and reassure them you're there for them
- take their feelings seriously – don't tell them to 'calm down' or 'get over it'
- encourage them to talk about what's happening in their life and remind them that talking about a problem can help
- spend time together and take an interest in their activities
- discuss their strengths with them and give positive feedback
- listen to their concerns – listen openly, attentively, and don't rush to problem solving
- check in often with your young person.

Family and friends can provide vital support for young people when they are having a tough time.



Encourage activities that promote good mental health

Tips that promote good mental health include:

- connecting with others
- staying active
- eating well
- limiting alcohol and other drug use
- getting into life
- sleeping well
- learning new coping skills.

Offer support

Let your young person know there is lots of help available.

- Professional support is available for both you and your young person. Help find an appropriate service, such as a headspace centre or eheadspace and support them to engage/offer to go with them.
- Ask direct questions if you're concerned about suicide. It's OK to ask directly. Research shows that talking about suicide will not make someone carry out the behaviour. You might choose to be specific about what you have seen that's causing you concern.
- If you're worried they might self-harm you can ask directly, try to understand their reasons and encourage them to seek professional support.

Self-care for family and friends

Caring for a loved one who is experiencing a tough time can impact on your health and wellbeing. Looking after yourself is important as it can leave you better placed to provide support to your young person. Get support by talking to someone you trust and seek professional help if you need it. It's important to look after yourself during these times. By doing so, you're also modelling good self-care for your young person.

Other useful websites

- [beyondblue](#)
- [SANE Australia](#)
- [Parent helplines](#) (Google 'Parentline' along with your State or Territory)
- [eheadspace](#) (online and phone support)
- [your local headspace centre](#) can direct you to some Family and Friends support groups

Getting support

If someone you care about is in crisis, call triple zero (000). You can also go to your local hospital emergency department. Remember to stay with the person until they're able to access professional support.

If you are feeling overwhelmed and need to speak to someone now, contact:

- [Lifeline on 13 11 14](#)
- [the Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467](#)



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au

If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

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National Youth Mental Health Foundation



starting a conversation with a young person about mental health

Conversations about mental health are helpful

Family and friends play a vital role in identifying and supporting a young person who's experiencing the impacts of mental ill-health.

Let your young person know that you care about them no matter what they're going through. This is important and helps encourage young people to seek support early to manage the impact of mental ill-health.

Evidence has shown that having supportive loved ones involved in mental health care creates and improves longer lasting, positive outcomes for young people.

Conversations about mental health can be challenging

Talking to young people about mental health can feel hard, especially when you or your young person are uncomfortable talking about sensitive topics like mental health.

There is no 'right way' to have these conversations. Different approaches work better for different people. It's OK to feel unsure about how or when to start these conversations. No one gets these conversations perfect but taking the time to learn more is a great start.

How do I know if I need to have a conversation about mental ill-health?

Family members and friends can often tell when something isn't quite right. You might notice that a young person is acting differently, or there are changes to their behaviour.



If you notice changes, it's a good time to have a conversation about what might be happening in their life.

Tips for having the conversation

Having a conversation can feel overwhelming. Here are some tips for talking with your young person.

1. check in with yourself

- Ensure that you're feeling calm and open to listening.
- Consider if it is the right time to have the conversation.
- Be aware of your body language and tone of voice.

2. setting the scene

- Think about where.
- It can help to be side-by-side rather than looking directly at each other. Perhaps go for a drive, a walk, or somewhere your young person feels comfortable.

3. Be prepared to listen

- Listening to your young person is an important part of the process.
- Take their feelings seriously. Listen carefully, reflect back and don't judge (it can be more useful at times to say nothing than to offer solutions).
- Take a 'you and me vs the problem' approach. This lets them know you'll figure it out together.

4. starting the conversation

- There are many ways to start the conversation. You could begin with general and open questions like: how is [e.g., school/sport] going?
- When focusing on more specific thoughts and feelings, 'I' statements are important: 'I feel like you/I've noticed you [haven't been yourself lately] – how are things?'

How you talk with your young person will depend on their age and understanding. The language you use should feel natural. If your young person talks about their mental health, reassure them that you're glad and relieved that they're talking to you, you're proud of them, and they're not alone in their journey.



To learn more about these tips visit the link via the QR code on the next page.

What if I am concerned about their safety?

If you are concerned about someone's safety it is important that you talk to them directly.

Here are some tips to help you:

- talk openly and honestly (this helps show them that you care)
- let them know that you are concerned about their safety
- acknowledge the difficulty of opening up about thoughts or feelings and reassure them it can help
- reassure them that you'll be there for them and ask what they need from you (they might not know what they need)
- if you're worried about suicide, ask direct questions, such as 'have you ever thought about suicide/ending your life?' (If you're not sure how you might feel hearing 'yes' to this question, seek professional support to help you manage the conversation)
- if you're worried they might self harm you can ask directly, try to understand their reasons and encourage them to seek professional support
- offer to work together to find information and appropriate services, such as headspace, and offer to go with them.

My young person doesn't want support

Sometimes young people might say there isn't anything wrong and/or refuse help (either verbally or through body language). This can feel overwhelming for family or friends who are unsure what they can do. It's OK for you to reach out for professional support in your role as family.

It's OK to raise your concerns again and again. Opening up can take time so it's important to reflect and keep trying. You could also try different approaches.



Sometimes support is continuing to let a young person know you're there until they're ready to access support and that you won't give up on them.

Self-care

Caring for a loved one who is experiencing a hard time can have an impact on you. Looking after yourself is important as it leaves you better placed to provide help. Importantly, it also lets you show your young person how you manage life's ups and downs.



Getting support

For more information and resources for family and friends, or to join a group chat with other parents, visit headspace.org.au/ online-and-phone-support or call 1800 650 890. You can also search for your nearest headspace centre online, or contact Parent HelpLine.

Here are some other ideas on where to access support:

- suggest other people the young person could talk to like a trusted adult, GP or online/telephone service like eheadspace
- access your own support – clinicians can work with family members to help them support their young person
- access support as a family – family therapy can sometimes feel less confronting for a young person and can reduce feelings that they are 'the problem'
- attend a group parenting education program such as Tuning into Teens.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au

If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

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supporting a young person after a natural disaster

Everyone will experience or respond to a natural disaster differently.

The type of support young people need is different in the response phase (initial days to weeks following a natural disaster) to the recovery phase (the following months). Life changes for everyone during and after a natural disaster, even if we haven't been at the event.

Direct and indirect exposure

Direct exposure can be understood as the loss of possessions, the loss of safety or health, or the death of loved ones or animals.

Indirect exposure is commonly understood as exposure via third parties, whether through stories of family and friends affected, or by exposure to media (radio, television, newspapers and social media).

Both of these exposures can have an immediate and lasting impact on our mental health and wellbeing.

Young people are especially vulnerable to the indirect effects of natural disasters. This is due to these events sometimes being their first exposure, their developmental stage

and their increased chance of seeing lots of graphic content – especially on social media.

There is no right or wrong way to react to a traumatic event. Some people might experience sadness and seek connection to others while others might feel numb and become more disconnected. Following a natural disaster any reaction can be normal. You might notice changes to sleep, eating patterns, relationships or difficulty with routine activities like getting dressed or schooling.



These are normal reactions to not normal events.

Supporting young people during the initial response to a natural disaster

Encouraging a sense of hope is important in a young person's recovery



The following tips are helpful in the initial days and weeks following exposure to a natural disaster:

- Discuss the importance for young peoples' need to focus on physical and emotional safety, and be with those who are supportive of their wellbeing.
- Support young people to engage in activities that promote a sense of calm and feeling grounded (use of alcohol and other drugs can be unhelpful).
- Supporting young people to return to some routine and to get back to doing what they used to do as much as possible is helpful (e.g., playing games or sports, hobbies).
- Support connection with others, especially those that help young people feel OK.
- Include young people in the repair and recovery of their community and support them to identify ways that they can safely connect with themselves, peers, and families in ways that are meaningful and purposeful to them.
- Limit exposure to traumatic information through stories, and media (social and traditional). It can be helpful to take a break from the 24-hour news cycle.

(Hobfoll et al, 2007)



Supporting young people during the recovery phase following a natural disaster

Encourage your young person to engage in activities that promote a healthy headspace.

As much as possible, support young people to maintain regular routines and stay connected to regular activities such as sport, school, uni or TAFE, and spending time with friends.

People who experience traumatic events are often able to recover, and don't experience ongoing symptoms or difficulties, by using their own skills and the supports of family, friends and the broader community.

For some it's important to access professional support to help with these challenges.

Common reactions and behaviours you might notice:

- grief and loss
- difficulty concentrating or describing what happened
- anger and confusion
- sadness and emptiness
- guilt
- denial
- shock
- changes in appetite and sleep
- fear, anxiety and insecurity.



How to help your young person

- provide stability
- offer reassurance
- normalise, but don't minimise
- explain gently what happened
- use the young person's strengths and likes
- be available and encourage coping skills
- role model healthy coping skills.

For further tips go to headspace.org.au/explore-topics/supporting-a-young-person/7-ways-to-support-a-healthy-headspace

Reaction of family and friends

Most people recover well from the emotional effects of natural disasters. Family and friends can have an important role in the healing process for young people. It's important to remember family and friends have their own challenges to cope with, and you may find yourself juggling your own reactions to the disaster with your responsibilities for the young person.

Reactions may include:

- guilt about not being able to shield your young person from the effects of the disaster
- fear and anxiety about the continuing safety of your young person
- negativity about the world in general, which you may not be able to conceal from your young person
- impatience and frustration about your young person making a slow recovery.

Look after yourself

Be kind to yourself and engage in self-care activities like sleeping well, connecting with others and staying active. These activities can be hard to do when facing stressful situations but try to do something small for yourself. It's also good for your young person to see these things modelled by others.



1. Hobfall et al. Five essential elements of immediate and mid-term mass trauma intervention: Empirical evidence. 2007; 70(4):283-315 (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/5668133_Five_Essential_Elements_of_Immediate_and_Mid-Term_Mass_Trauma_Intervention_Empirical_Evidence)

Getting support

It can be hard to know when it's time to seek professional support. Often, it's when someone experiences difficulties for longer than a couple of months after an event, and it's having an impact on the way they want to live their lives.

Seek immediate help if you think the young person is at risk, for example of self harm. Call your local hospital, emergency services (000), Lifeline (13 11 14) or Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800).



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au

If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

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maintaining a healthy headspace during the bushfire season - supporting your young person

Supporting your young person

The timing and duration of bushfire danger seasons vary across different regions in Australia. While the threat of bushfires can directly affect people living in high-risk areas, it's also normal to have reactions if you live further away and are indirectly affected (e.g., by media exposure or hearing from others).

Taking positive action and anticipating your own and your young person's emotional reactions during the bushfire season can be helpful for your wellbeing during and after this time.

Looking after yourself

Although you might feel like looking after yourself is not a priority, it is important to practise self-care. It can improve your ability to care for your young person going through a tough time. Talking to a trusted other, such as a family member, friend, Elder, or counsellor about any concerns and feelings you are having can be helpful.



Modelling self-care and help-seeking behaviours can be particularly important during the bushfire season, because your young person might look to you and be encouraged to also practise self-care.

Tips to support your young person's healthy headspace during the bushfire season

The following principles of Psychological First Aid (PFA) can help to guide you in supporting your young person at all times during the bushfire season:



Listen and look

- listen to questions and concerns
- be patient and understanding
- look at your young person's behaviour.



Protect

- focus on the steps needed to maintain your and your person's physical and emotional safety, or to return to safety as soon as possible
- resources such as the Red Cross RediPlan can help you stay focused and prioritise actions
- keep your young person informed of next steps.



Connect

- support your young person to feel connected to information, familiar people and places
- if you get separated during an emergency, reunite as soon as possible.



Tips to support your young person

Listen to your young person

During bushfire response and recovery, young people's experiences can be overlooked. Listening to young people is important because it helps them feel understood and can make them feel more in control. It can also help them to process their thoughts and feelings. Providing young people with reassurance and emotional support can help them feel more secure. Remember that you don't have to have all the answers. If you're unsure about how to answer a question, work with your young person to find out together.

Get informed

To prepare for an emergency, discuss ways of how you and your young person could work together. This may help your young person feel proactive and more in control. This could include the steps to take in an emergency (e.g., what to take with them when evacuation is required; where to meet in case you get separated).

It's important to keep informed about bushfire developments. This includes monitoring official warnings. It's also important to calmly communicate accurate information with your young person. At the same time, be aware that constant exposure to bushfire-focused news can increase negative feelings. You and your young person may want to discuss ways to help them and your household access media safely (e.g., set limits for media use, manage automatic app alerts, or unfollow content or pages).

Connect with others

Keeping in contact with friends, family, and neighbours, especially during days with high risks for bushfires can help people feel more grounded. It can also help you and your young person draw on your strengths by getting connected with people who are reassuring and comforting.

Talk about your young person's role in supporting others

You may also notice young people feel responsible for caring for other family members or friends. For instance, those young people who have younger siblings might feel responsible for the wellbeing of their siblings. Remember to regularly check in with all of your young people about their worries. Make sure to talk to your young people about whether they feel supported enough.

Practise calming techniques

In times of heightened stress, practising calming techniques can help with feeling grounded (e.g., taking slow and gentle breaths). You might want to encourage your young person to access apps or websites that help with feeling calm and maybe even practise the calming exercises together. Note that the use of alcohol and other drugs can be counterproductive.

Get into a routine as soon as you can

When the danger has subsided, returning to old routines or establishing new routines is helpful. For your young person, this can include going back to school, uni, TAFE, or their job, engaging in hobbies, and seeing friends. Encourage them to be involved in the activities that give them a sense of purpose.

Getting support

It's normal for you or your young person to experience a variety of reactions to the bushfire season. This doesn't mean either of you will have ongoing problems. If you or your young person are noticing a significant impact on your emotions, your daily activities or you're not finding any improvement, it's important to get professional help.



Make sure to talk to your young people about whether they feel supported enough.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au

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responding to family conflict



Conflict is a normal part of all relationships including those in your family and it's something we all experience at times.

Family looks different for different people. Family might include your biological family member(s), caregivers, partner, step family, housemates or close friends. Family conflict can occur between any of these people.

There are lots of different reasons family conflict occurs. We are all different and our unique experiences in life shape how we communicate, what we value and how we live our lives. Conflict can occur when others have different values, communication styles or believe things should be done in different ways, or we just misunderstand what someone means.

Family conflict can be more common at times of increased stress like isolation due to COVID-19 and this can affect the whole family or individual members. Other things such as job changes or loss, exams, health concerns, moving house and new or changing family members can also have an impact.

Dealing with family conflict

Conflict feels different for different people. Some people don't like conflict and will try to avoid it or please everyone. Others may try to defend themselves quickly as a way to protect themselves when they sense conflict. Others don't mind conflict and feel confident in being able to express their perspective, hear others and respond to family conflict.

If family conflict is occurring on a regular basis it may start to have an impact on a family member's stress, mood, how they feel about themselves and impact on their relationships even when the conflict is not happening.

Family relationships are important to us and can make us feel great when they are good and not so great when they are struggling. It is important to respond to family conflict in a calm and considered way that can hopefully lead to a mutual solution where everyone feels heard.

Please note

The latest medical information for COVID-19/Coronavirus is changing on a regular basis. If you would like to understand more, please visit the Department of Health's website.

[health.gov.au](https://www.health.gov.au)

You can also find more COVID-19 mental health information at: headspace.org.au/covid-19

Understanding and managing yourself

When understanding and responding to family conflict it is important to take some time to think about what it is that you are feeling and thinking. When we are feeling angry or hurt we can say or do things that we don't mean to the people we care about. It can also be really hard to talk about our feelings as it makes us feel vulnerable.

It is a good idea to think about what you are upset about so that you can communicate that clearly to your family members. It might be good to go to another room or to a quiet space somewhere to do this.

Some good things to think about and ask ourselves include:

- **Is this what I am really upset about?**

Sometimes we have had a bad day or are feeling tired and overwhelmed about other things but our family member says something that makes us feel overwhelmed and we react in the moment.

Other times it is not so much what has been said or done by the other person but it's more their body language or facial expression that's making us feel upset.

It can also be something small that has happened that brings up feelings associated with something bigger that we have experienced before.

- **What do I want the other person to know?**

It's good to think about and understand what the most important thing is that we want to let the other person know so that we can communicate this clearly.

It's also important to think about how you want to respond to family conflict. This might be how you would like family conflict to be resolved or thinking about helpful ways of responding to other members of the family.

Some ideas include:

- **Taking a 'you and me vs the problem' approach**

If you think about the problem side by side rather than 'you vs me' you are more likely to get a good outcome for everyone.

- **Letting the other person know that you care about them...**

...even though you may have different perspectives. Experiencing conflict with family doesn't mean we don't care about them. It is good to let the other person know this too.

- **Noticing your own physical reactions...**

...when experiencing conflict like a tense body or fists, fast thoughts, heart beating or tight chest. These are often the first signs that you are starting to get upset. It's understandable to be upset but this can make it harder to communicate clearly.

- **Acknowledge the experiences or feelings...**

...and take time out when required. If we notice ourselves getting upset, we can let the other person know this and that we need to take some time to calm down before talking.

- **Responding and repairing after conflict.**

If things don't go to plan that's okay. It's good to go back to the person, apologise and let them know that you would like to be able to try again. This can be hard to do but important for our relationships.

Remember that you are not always going to get all of this perfect, no one does. It can be really hard to take this approach with family members if you do not usually express feelings like this.



Timing

It is really important to think about when to have conversations in responding to family conflict.

When people are upset or angry their logical brain goes offline and we respond with our emotions instead. This is when we can end up saying things that we don't really mean. When we are in these moments of emotion it is good to try to take some time out, go for a walk or get some fresh air rather than talk to the person we are feeling upset with.

If this is happening for you, or the other person is still trying to talk to you about it, you could say:

- **I am feeling really [angry, hurt, scared, sad] right now and I need to take some time out.**
I really want to talk to you about this but I am hoping we can talk about this later when we are both calm.
- **I can see you are really [angry, hurt, scared, worried, sad] right now.**
I would really like to talk about it but feel like it would be good if we took some time to calm down first so that we can both listen to each other properly.

Communication is key

Communication is really important when responding to conflict. It can be the difference between people feeling heard, supported and understood in relationships or feeling further apart. Often what we are trying to say can get missed by other people depending on what is going on for both us and them at the time.

Some tips for good communication

1. **Acknowledge and summarise what the other person has said.**
This shows you're interested and listening to the other person. When we feel our perspective has been heard and understood we are more able to listen to what the other person has to say.
2. **Use 'I' statements to communicate.**
Using 'I' statements helps us to own what we are saying rather than giving a sense of blame that can happen with 'you' statements.
3. **Think about your non-verbal communication like facial expressions, nodding and body language.**
Non-verbal communication is as important, if not more important than what we are saying. If we say all the right things but our facial expression says something different the other person won't hear what we are saying.

4. **Be prepared to negotiate.**

It is important to go into conversations prepared to listen to the other person's perspective and see if we can find an agreement that works for everyone.

If you are not sure how you might start the conversation, here are some ideas:

- I can hear that you are feeling really [hurt, sad, scared, worried] about
- I am sorry I got angry with you. I was feeling
- When ... happens, I feel I would like it if you could ...
- I really care about you and can see that this is impacting on us both. How about we take some time together to think about how we could do this differently?
- How do you think we could do things differently?



How do I know if it is more than family conflict?

It can sometimes be hard to know the difference between what might be family conflict and what might be domestic violence. Domestic violence can occur to anyone in any relationship and it is never okay.

Domestic violence can take different forms including harming someone physically, verbally, sexually, psychologically, emotionally, economically, spiritually or legally.

Domestic violence can make you feel scared, confused or anxious a lot of the time in your family relationships.

If you are having any of these experiences or think you might be experiencing family violence it is important to talk to a professional about what you are experiencing.



Below are some places you can go to for help.

- 1800 Respect: 1800respect.org.au or 1800 737 732
- If you are ever in immediate danger, call the police on 000.

Where else can I go for help?

If you ever feel unable to cope because of overwhelming or intense emotions, or if you have any thoughts of harming yourself, then ask for help immediately.

National 24/7 crisis services

- Lifeline: 13 11 14 or lifeline.org.au
- Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467 or suicidecallbackservice.org.au
- Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636 or beyondblue.org.au

Additional youth support services

- headspace: visit headspace.org.au to find your nearest centre or call eheadspace on 1800 650 890
- Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 or kidshelpline.com.au
- ReachOut: reachout.com
- SANE Australia: 1800 187 263 or sane.org

Talk with a trusted adult, such as a parent, teacher, school counsellor or find out if there is a headspace centre near you.

Speak to your local doctor or General Practitioner (GP) and help make a plan for your recovery. Or you can search for a health service and GP on [healthdirect](https://healthdirect.gov.au).

Other useful headspace links

- Understanding anger issues in children:
<https://headspace.org.au/friends-and-family/understanding-anger-issues-in-children/>
- Building a healthy relationship with your young person
<https://headspace.org.au/friends-and-family/building-a-healthy-relationship-with-your-young-person/>



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time, you can get help and support from headspace, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider.

For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au



support for families

to help young people who are exploring their identity

Secondary school can be an amazing time of self-discovery, learning and change.

Along with studying, it's also when many young people start exploring the elements that make up their identity. There's plenty to explore, including ethnicity, culture, beliefs and values, gender and sexuality, and more.

It can be a stressful and confusing time — for families and their young people — as they learn more about themselves. They can feel isolated. They can feel that nobody understands what they're going through.

Sometimes these stressors can feel overwhelming. It's important that they know that they don't have to wait to ask for help — that now is a good time to talk.

Having the support of family and friends can make a difference to a young person's life and their emotional wellbeing. For you, it means acknowledging when they're struggling emotionally, and what to do to support them.

This is where the headspace NIP it in the bud framework can help to resolve problems before they feel too overwhelming to manage. The NIP framework helps you to **Notice** changes in mood and behaviour, **Inquire** sensitively and competently and **Provide** information to help young people access the right support.



Notice

The first step is to notice changes in your young persons behaviour.

You may want to consider whether they're being affected by other things — like what's happening at school with their friends, interactions on social media, issues in the media etc.

If you have noticed changes in their behaviour, try to work out how long it might have gone on for. There might be other symptoms of emerging mental wellbeing problems that they may need extra support for.

Signs to look out for:

- Noticeable changes in behaviour e.g. feelings of anger, sadness, lack of focus
- No longer enjoying things that interest them
- Easily irritated and having problems with friends e.g. withdrawal, acting out
- Changes in eating or sleeping
- Turning to alcohol or drugs to cope with feelings
- Unusually stressed or worried.



Inquire

This is your opportunity to ask and gather the information you need to work out what other support or action you may need to take. It's important to ask what the young person needs, rather than assume. Remember, listening can be just as powerful as offering solutions.

There's no perfect way to start a conversation about mental health. Find a time and place where everyone involved is feeling safe to talk about it.

You're trying to understand their experience so you're in a better place to help. Some ways to try having this conversation might be:

- "Hey, I've noticed you seem to have a lot on your mind at the moment. Do you want to talk about it?"

- "How are your friends at the moment, how have things been going with them?"
- A way to start a conversation could even just be an invitation to do something together. Then, you can try asking about things once you're doing the activity. Asking straight up could be too intense.

How to help:

1. Don't be judgmental, and actively listen
2. Choose an appropriate place and time, with the right people there
3. Be aware of your body language and theirs
4. Acknowledge their experience
5. Reflect and clarify the details
6. Give them reassurance and be hopeful
7. Normalise their experience, don't minimise it
8. Validate and encourage them to seek help (see next step: Provide)



Provide

It's about having a two-way conversation with your young person to help them decide what they might need at that time, and you as a family member helping them plan the steps to access it. Responding in a way that shows you are there for them.

Based on what comes out of your conversation, you'll have a direction for what further support you may need.

Questions you could ask:

- "It sounds like things at school are really tough right now. How would you feel about us having a brainstorm on some things we could try to ease the stress?"
- "I'm not feeling very confident about the best way to help at the moment. Would it be OK if we called a service to help us figure out the best way forward?"
- "I'd like to find a way that I can be helpful for you. Would that be OK for you?"
- "I'm hearing that X is really difficult at the moment, and I'm really glad you've come to me. I don't know a lot about X, but I'd really like to learn so that we can work through this together – how do you feel about that?"



For more information on how to support your young person using the NIP it in the bud framework, visit headspace.org.au/nipitinthebud

support for families

to help young people on social media

Secondary school can be a challenging time for young people affected by social media.

Social media has become an integral part of the daily lives of many young people. Its constant presence can have a profound impact on mental health and wellbeing. On one hand, social media provides a platform for young people to connect with others, share interests and express themselves creatively. On the other, it can also negatively impact their mental health and wellbeing, causing feelings of anxiety, depression, and insecurity.

Sometimes these stressors can feel overwhelming. It's important that your young

person knows that they don't have to wait to ask for help — that now is a good time to talk.

Having the support of family and friends can make a difference to a young person's life and their emotional wellbeing. For you, it means acknowledging when they're struggling emotionally, and what to do to support them.

This is where the headspace NIP it in the bud framework can help to resolve problems before they feel too overwhelming to manage. The NIP framework helps you to **Notice** changes in mood and behaviour, **Inquire** sensitively and competently and **Provide** information to help young people access the right support.



Notice

The first step is to notice changes in your young person's behaviour.

You may want to consider whether they're being affected by other things — like what's happening at school, interactions on social media, issues in the media etc.

If you have noticed changes in their behaviour, try to work out how long it might have gone on for. There might be other symptoms of emerging mental wellbeing problems that they may need extra support for.

Signs to look out for:

- Unable to switch off from social media, distracting attention from other things
- Pressure to stay relevant and up-to-date
- Comparing their lives with those of others on social media
- Attempts to monetise their social media content
- Negative effects from cyberbullying
- Noticeable changes in behaviour e.g. feelings of anger, sadness, lack of focus
- No longer enjoying things that interest them
- Easily irritated and having problems with friends e.g. withdrawal, acting out.



Inquire

This is your opportunity to find out what's going on. By asking questions and listening, you see what other support or action you may need to take. It's important to ask what the young person needs, rather than assume. Remember, listening can be just as powerful as offering solutions.

There's no perfect way to start a conversation about mental health. Find a time and place where everyone involved is feeling safe to talk about it.

You're trying to understand their experience so you're in a better place to help. Some ways to try having this conversation might be:

- "Hey, I've noticed you seem to have a lot on your mind at the moment. Do you want to talk about it?"

- "How are your friends at the moment, how have things been going with them?"
- A way to start a conversation could even just as an invitation to do something together. Then, you can try asking about things once you're doing the activity. Asking straight up could be too intense.

Be mindful how you bring up the topic of social media with your young person. Avoid things like commenting on the amount of time they spend on it, as they may become defensive and less likely to open up.

How to help:

1. Don't be judgmental, and actively listen
2. Choose an appropriate place and time, with the right people there
3. Be aware of your body language and theirs
4. Acknowledge their experience
5. Reflect and clarify the details
6. Give them reassurance and be hopeful
7. Normalise their experience, don't minimise it
8. Validate and encourage them to seek help (see next step: Provide)



Provide

It's about having a two-way conversation with your young person to help them decide what they might need at that time, and you as a family member helping them plan the steps to access it. Responding in a way that shows you are there for them.



For more information on how to support your young person using the NIP in the bud framework, visit headspace.org.au/nipinthebud

While suggesting they take a break from social media may sound like good advice, a young person may not feel like that's an option. They may be open to finding a balance or reducing their time. There are many smaller steps they can take like turning off notifications or unfollowing accounts that make them feel bad.

Based on what comes out of your conversation, you'll have a direction for what further support you may need.

Questions you could ask:

- "It sounds like being on social media is a bit stressful at the moment? How would you feel about us having a brainstorm on some things we could try to ease the stress?"
- "I'd like to find a way that I can be helpful for you. Would that be OK for you?"
- "I'm not feeling very confident about the best way to help at the moment. Would it be OK if we called a service to help us figure out the best way forward?"
- "I'm hearing that X is really difficult at the moment, and I'm really glad you've come to me. I don't know a lot about X, but I'd really like to learn so that we can work through this together — how do you feel about that?"



support for families

to help young people navigate relationships

Secondary school can be a challenging time for young people making social connections.

Relationships can be complicated enough for adults. They can be even more complicated for young people when they are navigating different social groups. They have their relationships with classmates and friends, family members, as well as romantic partners.

Relationships can bring joy, but they can also bring challenges and stress that can negatively impact your young person's emotional and social wellbeing.

Sometimes these stressors can feel overwhelming. It's important that young people know that they don't have to wait to ask for help — that now is a good time to talk.

Having the support of family and friends can make a difference to a young person's life and their emotional wellbeing. For you, it means acknowledging when they're struggling emotionally, and what to do to support them.

This is where the headspace NIP it in the bud framework can help to resolve problems before they feel too overwhelming to manage. The NIP framework helps you to **Notice** changes in mood and behaviour, **Inquire** sensitively and competently and **Provide** information to help young people access the right support.



Notice

The first step is to notice changes in your young person's behaviour.

You may want to consider whether they're being affected by other things — like what's happening at school, interactions on social media, issues in the media etc.

If you have noticed changes in their behaviour, try to work out how long it might have gone on for. There might be other symptoms of emerging mental wellbeing concerns that they may need extra support for.

Signs to look out for:

- Noticeable changes in behaviour e.g. feelings of anger, sadness, lack of focus
- No longer enjoying things that interest them
- Easily irritated and having problems with friends e.g. withdrawal, acting out.



Inquire

This is your opportunity to find out what's going on. By asking questions and listening, you see what other support or action you may need to take. It's important to ask what the young person needs, rather than assume. Remember, listening can be just as powerful as offering solutions.

There's no perfect way to start a conversation about mental health. Find a time and place where everyone involved is feeling safe to talk about it.

You're trying to understand their experience so you're in a better place to help. Some ways to try having this conversation might be:

- "Hey, I've noticed you seem to have a lot on your mind at the moment. Do you want to talk about it?"

- "How are your friends at the moment, how have things been going with them?"
- A way to start a conversation could even just as an invitation to do something together. Then, you can try asking about things once you're doing the activity. Asking straight up could be too intense.

How to help:

1. Don't be judgmental, and actively listen
2. Choose an appropriate place and time, with the right people there
3. Be aware of your body language and theirs
4. Acknowledge their experience
5. Reflect and clarify the details
6. Give them reassurance and be hopeful
7. Normalise their experience, don't minimise it
8. Validate and encourage them to seek help (see next step: Provide)



Provide

It's about having a two-way conversation with your young person to help them decide what they might need at that time, and you as a family member helping them plan the steps to access it. Remember to respond in a way that shows you're there for them.

Based on what comes out of your conversation, you'll have a direction for what further support you may need.

Questions you could ask:

- "I'm hearing that X is really difficult at the moment, and I'm really glad you've come to me. I don't know a lot about X, but I'd really like to learn so that we can work through this together — how do you feel about that?"
- "Would you like me to help you figure out ways — like learning some coping skills — that might help you?"
- "I'd like to find a way that I can be helpful for you. Would that be OK for you?"
- "I'm not feeling very confident about the best way to help at the moment. Would it be OK if we called a service to help us figure out the best way forward?"



For more information on how to support your young person using the NIP in the bud framework, visit headspace.org.au/nipitinthebud

support for families

helping young people face uncertainty

Planning what happens in the future can be challenging for young people.

As your young person embarks on adulthood, they'll face new opportunities and challenges that can bring both excitement and uncertainty. They might be thinking about higher education, vocational training, or their first job, and feel worried about aligning their plans with yours and your family's expectations.

With the added stress of global issues, the future can feel overwhelming. But it's important to let them know that they don't have to endure these feelings alone and that now is a great time to reach out for help.

Having the support of family and friends can make a difference to a young person's life and their emotional wellbeing. For you, it means acknowledging when they're struggling emotionally, and what to do to support them.

This is where the headspace NIP it in the bud framework can help to resolve problems before they feel too overwhelming to manage. The NIP framework helps you to **Notice** changes in mood and behaviour, **Inquire** sensitively and competently and **Provide** information to help young people access the right support.



Notice

The first step is to notice changes in your young person's behaviour.

You may want to consider whether they're being affected by other things — like what's happening at school, interactions on social media, issues in the media etc.

If you have noticed changes in their behaviour, try to work out how long it might have gone on for. There might be other

symptoms of emerging mental wellbeing problems that they may need extra support for.

See how they behave when talking about or planning the future. Are they irritable or nervous, or do they actively avoid talking about the future?

Signs to look out for:

- Irritability or nervousness when talking about their future
- Active avoidance of the topic
- Difficulty making decisions about their future or finding a job
- Noticeable changes in behaviour e.g. feelings of anger, sadness, lack of focus
- No longer enjoying things that interest them
- Easily irritated and having problems with friends e.g. withdrawal, acting out.



Inquire

This is your opportunity to find out what's going on. By asking questions and listening, you see what other support or action you may need to take. It's important to ask what the young person needs, rather than assume. Remember, listening can be just as powerful as offering solutions.

There's no perfect way to start a conversation about mental health. Find a time and place where everyone involved is feeling safe to talk about it.

You're trying to understand their experience so you're in a better place to help. Some ways to try having this conversation might be:

- "Hey, I've noticed you seem to have a lot on your mind at the moment. Do you want to talk about it?"

- "How are your friends at the moment, how have things been going with them?"
- A way to start a conversation could even just as an invitation to do something together. Then, you can try asking about things once you're doing the activity. Asking straight up could be too intense.

How to help:

1. Actively listen, and be non-judgmental
2. Choose an appropriate place and time, with the right people there
3. Be aware of your body language and theirs
4. Acknowledge their experience
5. Reflect and clarify the details
6. Give them reassurance and be hopeful
7. Normalise their experience, don't minimise it
8. Validate and encourage them to seek help (see next step: Provide)



Provide

It's about having a two-way conversation with your young person to help them decide what they might need at that time, and you as a family member helping them plan the steps to access it. Remember to respond in a way that shows you're there for them.

There are services that can help. Your young person could benefit from talking to a mental health clinician, accessing headspace work & study support, reading online resources or joining a group chat to find other young people dealing with similar worries.

Based on what comes out of your conversation, you'll have a direction for what further support you may need.

Questions you could ask:

- "It sounds like things at school are really tough right now. How would you feel about us having a brainstorm on some things we could try to ease the stress?"
- "I'd like to find a way that I can be helpful for you. Would that be OK for you?"
- "I'm not feeling very confident about the best way to help at the moment. Would it be OK if we called a service to help us figure out the best way forward?"
- "I'm hearing that X is really difficult at the moment, and I'm really glad you've come to me. I don't know a lot about X, but I'd really like to learn so that we can work through this together — how do you feel about that?"



For more information on how to support your young person using the NIP it in the bud framework, visit headspace.org.au/nipitinthebud



employers & educators

1. how to have a supportive conversation
2. creating a mentally healthy workplace
3. responding to disclosures of mental health issues
4. taking care of yourself & supporting a young worker
5. advantages of hiring young employees
6. support for educators: to help young people exploring their identity
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10. supporting international students: information for education institutions, youth services and mental health service providers



how to have a supportive conversation

If you are a manager of young workers, it is important to be able to talk about mental health in a supportive way. NIP stands for Notice, Inquire, Plan. It is a helpful acronym to remember what to do when you want to talk to a young worker about their mental health.

Notice

If a young worker is beginning to struggle with their mental health, there are signs that a colleague or manager might notice.

Possible early warning signs are easier to spot when you know how an employee usually behaves, interacts, and feels. Noticing a change from what is normal for them is important.

What you might notice - indicators of possible distress in the workplace

Behavioural

Are they...?

- quieter or more withdrawn than usual?
- not taking part in meetings or workplace banter like they usually do?
- less productive, making mistakes or struggling to meet the demands of work?
- taking more time off, coming in late?
- seeming less motivated, forgetful, or distracted, having trouble following instructions?
- having more trouble getting along with others?

Physical

Are they...?

- tired at work? Sleep and energy are often impacted by mental health difficulties
- unwell more often, for example with colds, stomach upsets or headaches? Sometimes our physical health suffers when we are feeling stressed
- behaving, dressing, or appearing different suddenly?

Emotional

How someone is feeling is not always easy to observe and a supportive discussion might be required to understand the young worker's emotions. How do they say they feel?

Are they...?

- having more trouble managing work stress?
- more sensitive to criticism?
- more easily overwhelmed?
- more irritable?
- less confident?
- seeming sad or anxious?

It is important to understand that warning signs do not necessarily indicate that a worker has mental health problems. They are indicators that there *may* be something going wrong for them and that it *might* be time for you to instigate a conversation to find out more and help them to find the support that they require.

Inquire

Now that you have noticed some warning signs it is time to have a conversation with your young worker.

Preparing for a supportive conversation about mental health

Think about a good time and place to have a conversation that could be about sensitive topics: make sure you both have enough time and that the place is private.

Be prepared that they may not feel ready to talk. Discussing personal struggles can be hard, especially at work. Consider whether you are the best person to have this conversation with them? Is there someone else that they might prefer to talk with?

It's a good idea to check whether your workplace has a policy or procedure that provides guidance on how to have supportive conversations about mental health. If your workplace has a HR department, consider having a confidential chat with them about how to best support the young worker.

Starting the conversation

Ensure the young worker understands that you would like to talk to them because you are concerned, and that this is not a performance management conversation. Being summoned to a meeting with a manager when you are struggling can create additional stress. You can assist this by being clear about the goals of the conversation.

Here's how you might like to approach it:

- Ask, 'How have things been going for you lately?'
- Comment on the changes that you've noticed and let them know you're concerned for them.
- Be relaxed in your approach. You don't want them to feel like they're under investigation or that this is related to their performance at work.

Here are some examples:

- 'I've noticed that I'm happy to talk or listen and see if I can help.'
- 'I'm a bit worried about you, I've noticed How are things?'
- 'Lately you seem What is happening for you? We can work it out together if that would help.'

Respond appropriately

If the person decides to open up, affirm their choice to talk about their mental health and acknowledge it can be a hard step to take.

Avoid saying things like 'look on the bright side' as it might make them feel misunderstood. Instead, you could say things like:

- 'That sounds really stressful/difficult. How can I help?'
- 'Thank you for telling me. I know it can be hard to open up.'
- 'It sounds like it's really important for you to get some support with all this.'

The young worker may choose not to open up and they are not obliged to disclose a mental health difficulty unless it impacts their work role. It's important to respect the young worker's decision and avoid becoming intrusive. Be clear about what you need to do from here.

For example:

- 'You have said you don't want help and I respect that; I am still a bit worried though, so I am going to... (check in again, talk to someone else)'
- 'Do you have a GP you can talk to?' or 'Is there someone else on the team that you would feel comfortable to talk with?'

It's important to ask for the young workers permission before talking to someone else about their mental health. In situations where you are required to share their information, be transparent with the young worker about your responsibilities and include them in the process as much as possible.

Plan

Following a conversation, you can make a plan in collaboration with the young worker about what should come next. Consider the steps that can be taken in and outside of the workplace so that they get the support that they require.

When planning what to do next it can be helpful to consider the following questions:

- What are the next steps?
- Who is responsible?
- Who else should be involved?

Steps that can be taken in the workplace

There will be adjustments that can be made at work to support their wellbeing. The **Beyond Blue Heads Up** resource has some suggestions on working with a mental health condition (headsup.org.au).

Consider what simple changes can be made to support them in the workplace. For example, they might need some adjustments to their role, flexible start, finish or break times, or to plan a period of leave. If you have access to an Employee Assistance Program you could suggest this as an option.

Where to next? Seeking help outside of work

Sometimes lifestyle changes like increasing exercise, sleep or eating better will help. The worker might benefit from encouragement to take breaks, or to reconnect to activities that bring them pleasure. It might be a good time to encourage them to reach out to loved ones and let them know that they are struggling, or they might like to seek some external assistance from a counsellor.

If the difficulties are more significant and beginning to have an impact on the worker's functioning, they should be encouraged to access a support service or healthcare provider to discuss their situation.

There are several options for next steps outside of work.

- A GP is often a good place to begin. They will know local service providers and can help to sort out the right place to go.
- If the person is 25 or under, they can contact their local headspace centre (headspace.org.au/headspace-centres).
- eheadspace provides free online and telephone support for young people (12-25 years) and their families and friends (headspace.org.au/eheadspace).

If it is an emergency and assistance is needed urgently they can go to the local emergency department or call 000. They could also call Lifeline 13 11 14 or Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800.



For more information on what you can do to support young employees at work, check out headspace.org.au/employers

creating a mentally healthy workplace

Mental health difficulties are common and can impact a person's capacity to function in the world, including at work. However, there are processes that can be put into place to help people to thrive and successfully contribute to your workplace.

The cost of mental health in the workplace

It is estimated that workplaces that support the wellbeing of their staff experience three times less absenteeism than less supportive workplaces¹.

If the mental health of employees is not prioritised, workplaces may have problems with low morale, underperformance, absenteeism, a poor public image, and staff turnover might be higher. Absenteeism and presenteeism costs Australian workplaces up to \$17 billion per year². Creating a mentally healthy workplace is in everybody's interest!



Did you know?

There are more workers compensation claims for 'mental injury' than claims for physical injury? By setting up your workplace with the right supports and structures you can create the conditions for a mentally healthy workforce.

Young workers need particular support for their wellbeing at work

Whilst the areas covered in this article will benefit all of your staff, young employees might require some additional thought. It can be harder for young workers to understand what is expected of them at work, and to have a voice when things are not going well – especially if it's their first job. They might feel the need to demonstrate their work ethic or 'earn their stripes' and not look after themselves as they should. Or they might feel that their opinions are not as important as those with more experience.

How is your workplace demonstrating the importance of psychological health to its young workers? Are they explicitly encouraged to take breaks, leave on time, make use of supportive practices at work? They might need to hear from leaders that such practices are supported.

How is your workplace showing young people that they will be listened to if they raise concerns or have ideas about wellbeing? Can you include younger staff on a wellbeing working group or explicitly request their input?

How is your workplace creating opportunities for young workers to build social connections and practice self-care? Do they have time during work hours to get to know each other? Are you scheduling a range of group-based activities – not just those that revolve around alcohol?

Consider providing young workers with a supportive mentor to help them to develop confidence, skills and supportive relationships in the workplace.

¹ Worksafe Queensland

² Productivity Commission. (2020). Mental Health Inquiry Report. Canberra.

Promoting positive practices

Promoting mental health in the workplace involves taking a strengths-based approach, focusing on opportunities and resources that help to foster a healthy, positive and supportive workplace culture.

Management commitment

Creation of a mentally healthy workplace takes management commitment. If you show your workers that you are serious about workplace mental health, they'll be more likely to follow your lead. According to Worksafe Australia, to demonstrate your commitment, you should: get involved in health and safety issues, invest time and money in health and safety, and ensure health and safety responsibilities are clearly understood. This applies to all workplace risks, including those that impact mental health. Do you remind leaders of their obligations and of the benefits of supporting mental health at work?

Businesses need a plan to eliminate or minimise psychological health and safety risks to the public and their staff. Safework Australia offer a **free online tool**, called People at Work, to help businesses identify, assess and manage psychosocial risks at work and provide guidance on practical ways to manage them. For further information visit www.peopleatwork.gov.au.

Identifying psychosocial hazards

Leaders should develop and endorse workplace policies that align with a mentally healthy workplace, for example an anti-bullying policy.

Young workers may require learning and development opportunities around the effective identification and management of psychosocial hazards in the workplace. Psychosocial hazards are things that increase stress at work (for example, bullying, lack of role clarity, or low levels of job control). In addition, your leaders and staff may require assistance and training to build their capacity to recognise and respond to psychosocial hazards that may impact on young workers' mental health.

Involve young workers in wellbeing at work

Can you include young workers in planning your 'mentally healthy workplace' initiatives? They may have ideas such as inclusive social events, making time for reflection about work, protecting breaks or encouraging staff to take accrued time off. You could invite young workers to be involved in developing and promoting communications such as emails, newsletters and posters with key messages that promote commitment to a mentally healthy workplace. Or support young workers to take on leadership roles in workplace wellbeing. Consult your young workers as they may have ideas about what will work.

Be a self care role model

Encourage young workers to stay well by modelling self care: let your staff see that you look after yourself too. Do you leave work on time? Take breaks? Have a healthy work/life balance? How do you manage stress? When you and your senior staff model self-care, it encourages young workers to do the same.

Train your staff to improve mental health in the workplace

Providing mental health training to supervisors and leaders is an important part of creating a mentally healthy workplace; they set the tone of a workplace's culture. Training such as **Mental Health First Aid** (mhfa.com.au) helps managers feel equipped to assist young people when they reach out for support.

WorksafeQueensland have devised a **Mentally Healthy Workplaces Toolkit** (worksafe.qld.gov.au) that includes the competencies for managers to reduce workplace stress.

Once you've trained your managers, consider extending this training to all employees.

Flexible work practices

Flexible work practices support the mental health of young workers by increasing their sense of control at work. Flexible practices are those that allow for alterations to be made to days, location or hours of work. Young workers may benefit from flexibility around their study, career or other responsibilities.

Your workplace benefits from flexibility too, making it more attractive to young job seekers and allowing you to retain staff for longer. Have you developed a policy around flexible work practices?

How do you maintain a healthy workplace culture?

Meaningful consultation with staff is a cornerstone of creating a mentally healthy workplace. If young people feel like they can reach out to you early, it helps things to feel less overwhelming. Regular check-ins with staff are an important way to develop open working relationships where problems can be raised in a timely way, supportive conversations can occur and problems can be addressed. This is especially important for young staff who may find it more difficult to seek support.

Promote a healthy workplace culture by putting the right structures in place to encourage consultation and ensure managers are aware of their responsibilities around workplace mental health. Does your workplace have a mental health policy? Is there a procedure in place that outlines how to consult young workers?

Learn more about how to have a supportive conversation by visiting headspace.org.au/employers.

Promoting respectful work interactions is important. Leaders should model open, honest and effective communication. Do you respond to people in a timely way? Are mistakes viewed as valuable learning opportunities? Disrespectful behaviour must be addressed and it is helpful to have policies to support expectations. Acknowledging the strengths and accomplishments of workers and seeking their input can help them to feel valued in their role.



The benefits of a mentally healthy workplace may include increases in productivity, work engagement, job satisfaction, attraction of top talent and decreases in work-related injuries, illnesses, claims, absenteeism and turnover.

The headspace Clinical Reference Group oversee and approve clinical resources made available on this website. Last reviewed 16 June 2021.



For more information on what you can do to support young employees at work, check out headspace.org.au/employers



responding to disclosures of mental health issues

Mental health issues are common and it is likely that at some point, people in your workplace may need support around their mental health and wellbeing.

This fact sheet will help you to know what you can say and do to support a young worker who lets you know that they're not OK, and to understand mental health issues and work rights.

Remaining at work or returning to work after a period of mental health difficulty has benefit for the young worker and business. It can improve quality of life, provide routine and structure, provide purpose for the young worker and help them to feel connected. Benefits for the workplace include retaining valuable skills and experience and creating a culture where people feel valued, supported and want to work.

Having a supportive conversation with your staff

Talking about mental health issues is often hard and many young workers will try to cope on their own for as long as they can. Reaching out to someone can take a lot of courage and is often a sign that they have reached a point where they would like to get some help.

Mental Health and Work Rights

As an employer, you are legally required to ensure (as far as is practical) that your staff are safe, both physically and mentally. For more information, visit [Safe Work Australia](https://safeworkaustralia.gov.au) (safeworkaustralia.gov.au).

Having a mental health condition does not often significantly affect a person's ability to perform their job and a worker is not required to disclose a mental health issue. However, it is important to offer a supportive conversation. For more guidance on privacy and disclosure, visit the [Australian Human Rights Commission website](https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/appendix-knowing-law) (humanrights.gov.au/our-work/appendix-knowing-law).

Starting the conversation

Some employers worry that they do not have the expertise to help. But you do not need to be an expert to be of support to a young worker. Some examples of ways to start a conversation might be:

- Ask, "How have things been going for you lately?"
- Comment on the changes that you've noticed and let them know you're concerned for them.
- 'I'm a bit worried about you, I've noticed how are things?'
- 'I've noticed that I'm happy to talk or listen and see if I can help.'

Be relaxed in your approach. You don't want them to feel like they're under investigation.

It's important to be clear on your intention too – this should be a supportive chat about mental health and not performance management. Being clear on the supportive focus of the conversation may help the young worker feel comfortable opening up.

When a young person is having problems with their mental health their work can be impacted. But for many young people continuing to attend work, with some support, flexibility and modifications can be good for their mental health and recovery.

Respond appropriately to a mental health disclosure in the workplace

If the person decides to talk to you, acknowledge it can be a hard step to take but reassure them that they have done the right thing. Let them know you care, show empathy, and thank them for talking with you.

Sometimes a young worker may open up unexpectedly and if you're not prepared, you might feel unsure of what to do. If this happens, consider moving the conversation to a private space and taking time to listen to what's going on for them.

It's ok to take it slow and taking a few deep breaths can help with managing feelings of being overwhelmed. Remember, you don't need to fix what's going on for the young worker – simply listening and offering support can go a long way.

Avoid saying things like 'look on the bright side' as it can contribute to a feeling of not being understood. Instead consider reflecting what they've told you and offering support by saying something like 'that sounds really stressful/difficult. How can I help?' or 'I'm sorry to hear that this is happening for you'.

If you get stuck or start to feel overwhelmed, take a deep breath, validate the young person's decision to reach out, let them know you want to help and assist them to connect with another support person. This might be a Human Resources manager, a trusted colleague, or a support service such as Lifeline or your Employee Assistance Program (if you have one).

Making a plan

If a young worker discloses mental health issues, it's important to collaborate with them to develop a plan to best support them at work. This plan may include addressing workplace concerns, making reasonable adjustments, involving others, and connecting the young worker with support.

If the young worker's mental health has been impacted by problems at work (such as work load pressures or bullying), take action to address these concerns and talk to the young worker about what they think needs to change to support their safety at work.

Reasonable adjustments are changes to a job role that help someone with a mental health condition to keep working or return to work if they have needed time off. The young worker may have ideas about what they need to best support them at work.

Accommodations that you might consider offering:

- Flexible work arrangements. For example, altering work times, places or providing breaks.
- Adjusting their role and seeking to minimise work stress.
- Helping line managers to understand how to respond and what the worker might need.

- Providing a supportive contact person or mentor to continue to check in with the worker and review the plan.
- Adjusting work schedules if the worker would like to take leave.
- Promoting and displaying support services in a prominent place.

Adjustments could be temporary or permanent and should be reviewed regularly.

Sometimes it's helpful to strengthen the young person's support network by involving others. Before sharing information with someone else, ask the young worker what they feel comfortable with others knowing. For example, a manager may need to know that the young person needs flexible work arrangements however they may not need to know the details of the employee's personal circumstances.

It's important to talk the young worker about who needs to know too. For example, the worker's line manager or HR might need to be aware, but all of their colleagues might not.

A worker may ask you to keep their disclosure to yourself. In these circumstances you should ensure that the information disclosed is confidential unless there is risk for the employee or others. Be clear about who you will tell and not tell.

What to do next

Seeking help outside of the workplace

After a mental health disclosure, there are several options to support the young worker for next steps outside of work.

- It can be helpful for a young person to let others in their life know of their difficulties. Can they tell a parent, house mate, friend or sibling?
- A GP is often a good place to begin. They will know local service providers and can help to sort out the right place to go.
- If the person is 25 or under they can contact their local headspace centre (headspace.org.au/headspace-centres).
- eheadspace provides free online and telephone support for young people (12-25 years) and their families and friends.

If it is an emergency the young worker can go to the local emergency department or call 000. They could call Lifeline 13 11 14 or Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800.

Once the plan is in place, it's important to regularly review how it's working for the young employee. Are the adjustments helpful? How are they going with obtaining support? Is there anything else they need to best support them at work?



Talking to someone about their mental health difficulties can be very hard for a young person. They may fear judgment, discrimination or that they might lose their job. Being met with understanding, care and concern can make it much easier for them to take the next step toward seeking help and getting back on track.



For more information on what you can do to support young employees at work, check out headspace.org.au/employers



taking care of yourself & supporting a young worker

As an employer or a manager, providing support to employees in your workplace is good practice. The benefits of a mentally healthy workplace may include increases in productivity, work engagement, job satisfaction, attraction of top talent and decreases in work-related injuries, illnesses, claims, absenteeism and turnover.

Sometimes taking on the important role of supporting the wellbeing of others can be personally challenging. It might remind you of difficulties in your own life and cause concern (or even stress) about the wellbeing of your young staff member. This article will help you to consider ways to look after yourself while you support others.



Taking care of yourself as a manager models the importance of self care for your staff. It helps to create a mentally healthy culture in your workplace.

Taking care of yourself

How much can you do? Sharing the responsibility

Looking after yourself involves setting healthy boundaries. Give some thought to what you can take on yourself and what part others might play.

Your role

Work plays a large part in people's lives and having a workplace that understands and supports good mental health is important to our wellbeing.

As a manager, you can encourage positive mental health by role modelling self-care. This might include maintaining work/life balance, taking time off when you're unwell, talking openly about mental health, and taking regular breaks.

Employers have a responsibility to assist young workers by making reasonable adjustments in the workplace to benefit their mental health. This might involve having regular supportive conversations with them, making temporary changes to their role, working conditions or approving additional breaks and leave.

You could think about factors in the workplace that are potentially contributing to worker stress, such as not being clear about their role and responsibilities, the amount of control they have over their work, workloads and time pressures. You could also provide encouragement to seek external support and perhaps even provide them with some suggestions for places that they could seek assistance.

Learn more about what you can do to create a mentally healthy workplace by visiting headspace.org.au/employers.

The role for others

You are not expected to be available out of work hours or to provide counselling for young workers. These are very reasonable boundaries to set. In fact, being clear on what you can and can't do might encourage the worker to seek the support that they need outside of work.

You are not expected to take responsibility for all aspects of your staff's wellbeing. You are one part of a community of support that may include a GP, the worker's family or significant others, a headspace centre or other support service. To find a headspace centre near you visit: headspace.org.au/headspace-centres.

When we take on too much, we start to feel overwhelmed and this reduces our capacity to be supportive towards others. Maintaining healthy boundaries supports you and your young workers by enabling you to continue to be compassionate in the long run. Consider what boundaries you need to put in place to sustain yourself at work. What changes do you notice in yourself that might indicate you're taking on too much? What can you do to support yourself when things start to go off track?

Self care ideas

You can use these tips to encourage the young worker that you are supporting but they are equally useful in taking care of yourself as a leader.

1. Get in to life

When stress increases, we can let go of many of the things that keep us well. Getting in to life can help to boost your mood and give you a sense of achievement. Regularly doing things that you enjoy is good for your wellbeing. Are you making time for hobbies, socialising, relaxing activities, trying something new, or creative? Are you continuing to grow your skills through professional development and staying connected to those aspects of your work that you're more passionate about? Do not let these things go when you are more stressed. You might need to start small by choosing one activity that makes you happy and trying to build on that over time when life is difficult.

2. Learn skills for tough times

We all have different ways of coping with difficult times. It is useful to reflect on what works for you and whether there is more that you could be doing to support yourself. Some people practice regular relaxation or mindfulness, others spend time in nature, whilst some of us use art, or talking to others as strategies to deal with stress.

3. Create connections

Relationships with friends, family (including pets), colleagues, and others in the community are essential to our mental health. Look for opportunities to strengthen your existing relationships or to develop new connections. For example, you might like to arrange to have lunch with a colleague, meet a friend for coffee, make a phone call to a family member, or re-join the social group that you were once a part of.

4. Eat well

Eating well is good for our physical health, it fuels the body and provides energy. But research tells us that it can also impact a person's mood and mental wellbeing too¹. Check in with yourself about whether you are eating a good balanced diet, minimal processed foods and plenty of whole foods like fruit, vegetables, whole grains and protein.

5. Stay active

Physical activity is also good for our mental health. It helps us to regulate our mood and to manage stress. How do you like to stay active? You might like to run, cycle, dance, do yoga or go to the gym. Consider ways to stay active at work like having walking meetings or regular strength breaks. Incorporating movement regularly is the key.

6. Get enough sleep

Sleep is vital for good mental health and often suffers during times of stress. Incorporate "winding down" activities before bed and minimise light and screen time before sleep. If you find it hard to wind down, try a mindfulness exercise like one from the Smiling Mind app.

7. Cut back on alcohol and other drugs

While it can be tempting to use alcohol or other drugs to get through hard times, they can trigger or contribute to mental health problems over time. Try to avoid using alcohol and other drugs when you're feeling down and reduce your use by learning new strategies for managing tough times. If you regularly connect with friends or colleagues over drinks, consider alternative like going out for lunch or trying something new together.

Check out Beyond Blue Heads Up for more tips on [Taking care of yourself and staying well](#) (headsup.org.au)

Connecting in with support

Part of taking care of yourself and supporting a young person includes modelling self-care and reaching out for support when you need it.

If you've noticed changes in your mental health, you might like to have a chat with a family member, a friend, or a trusted support person in your life.

If the difficulties your experiencing are more significant and beginning to have an impact on your daily functioning (for example, your ability to perform at work, get enough sleep, or to stay connected with others), you should consider accessing a support service or healthcare provider to discuss your situation.

A GP is often a good place to begin. They will know local service providers and can help to sort out the right place to go.

If you have an Employee Assistance Program, you might like to reach out to them for support.

[Beyond Blue](#) provides free online and telephone support and they may be able to point you in the right direction for assistance in your area (beyondblue.org.au).



How is your work life balance? How are you managing work stress?

Young workers are learning about how to behave in the workplace. What you model for them helps them to understand what is expected from them at work now and into the future.

Stress busters at work:

- Take 5 or 10 minutes to yourself
- Go for a short walk
- Talk to someone in a support role
- Have a healthy snack or cup of tea
- Do breathing exercises or stretching

¹ Jacka, F.N., Mykletun, A. & Berk, M. Moving towards a population health approach to the primary prevention of common mental disorders. BMC Med 10, 149 (2012).



For more information on what you can do to support young employees at work, check out headspace.org.au/employers

The headspace Clinical Reference Group oversee and approve clinical resources made available on this website. Last reviewed 16 June 2021.



the advantages of hiring young employees

Are you looking to recruit to a role in your business and considering giving an opportunity to a young person?

Employers can have perceptions about young employees in the workplace. But are these attitudes and ideas accurate? Here are some of the many benefits of including young people in your business or organisation.

Why young people can be an asset to your business

1. Innovation and diversity

Young employees can bring a different way of thinking to your workplace. These fresh perspectives can provide new and novel approaches and solutions so the learning goes both ways! Young workers bring an attitude of openness to your workplace, they celebrate difference and value equity and inclusion. Employing a young person can help your business keep up to date and provide a diversity of experience and ideas.



Young employees in the workplace

Did you know that having a positive experience at work can have a positive impact on a young person's mental health? Work is good for wellbeing. Employees who are supported in their mental health and well-being are more productive, are absent from work less often and are more likely to remain in a work role. This benefits businesses financially, with research suggesting that every dollar invested in effective mental health strategies can generate \$2.30 in benefits¹. A mentally healthy workplace is good for employees and for workplaces too.

Benefits of youth employment

Over the past decade there has been a decline in the proportion of young people in full time work. Young people are more likely than other age groups to be unemployed or under employed and face significant barriers to seeking employment. However, work has many benefits to health and wellbeing for young people. It builds skill, responsibility, and confidence, contributes to independence, financial security and improves mental health outcomes. It benefits the community too; improving productivity, building a workforce, avoiding the problems associated with financial disadvantage, and creating a sustainable future. There are many great reasons for taking on a young employee!

Young people have skills, enthusiasm and innovative ideas to bring to the workplace, helping your business to stay fresh and up to date. With support, a young employee can help your workplace to flourish, providing new skills and building a workforce for the future.

2. Technology

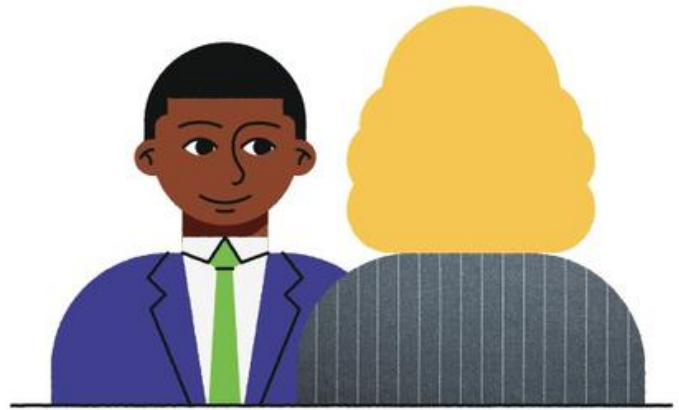
Technological advancement is moving quickly, and it can be hard to keep up. It is changing the nature of work and the types of skills required at work. Young people have grown up with technology (you might have heard of 'digital natives'?) and are readily able to apply and understand different types of technology in the workplace, sometimes assisting older workers in the process! Including young people on your team may help your business to adopt and use new processes, technologies and platforms.

3. Community connections

Including young workers in your team can help you to understand and reach a younger market. They have connections that older employees might not. They may be engaged in sporting clubs, education settings or be members of local recreational or volunteer groups. They know how to communicate with their younger peers, understand their needs and behaviours and can help your business to grow in this area too.

4. A willingness to learn

Young people are used to learning. They are keen to build their experience and apply their skills to a workplace. Their recent training (60% of 25-year olds have a post school qualification²) means that they are up to date with contemporary knowledge. They have a growth mindset and are more likely to absorb new learnings, giving you the opportunity to develop their skills to specifically meet the needs of your workplace. They will also be less set in their ways and easier to train. Young people are intrinsically motivated to grow, advance, and develop in new work roles. This capacity to be flexible and forward looking gives them the potential to learn and grow in areas that your business requires.



5. Enthusiasm

Young people are keen to contribute to the workplace. They often have inbuilt optimism and the ability to anticipate and adapt to change³. This enthusiasm can be infectious and contribute to workplace culture, helping to improve productivity, build teams and boost morale.

6. Support for your business

You might be able to take advantage of government supported traineeships or apprenticeships to assist with the costs and training of a young employee. This assists a young person in developing skills and getting a start in a career and subsidises the costs to the employer. To learn more about support for your business, visit the [Get Your Business Growing](https://www.getyourbusinessgrowing.gov.au/) website ([employment.gov.au/growing](https://www.getyourbusinessgrowing.gov.au/)).



Young people have skills, enthusiasm and innovative ideas to bring to the workplace, helping your business to stay fresh and up to date. With support, a young employee can help your workplace to flourish, providing new skills and building a workforce for the future.



¹ PricewaterhouseCoopers Australia, (2014). "Creating a mentally healthy workplace: return on investment analysis". Beyond Blue. [bl1269-brochure---pwc-roi-analysis.pdf](https://www.beyondblue.org.au/files/1269-brochure---pwc-roi-analysis.pdf) ([headsap.org.au](https://www.beyondblue.org.au/))

² Foundation for Young Australians The New Work Reality report 2018

³ Bradely and Devadason, 2010. "Fractured Transitions: Young Adults' Pathways into Contemporary Labour Markets", Sociology, Feb, Vol 42 (1), pp. 119-136



For more information on what you can do to support young employees at work, check out [headsap.org.au/employers](https://www.headspace.org.au/employers)





support for educators

helping young people face uncertainty

Planning what happens in the future can be challenging for young people.

The future can be both exciting and daunting for young people. The uncertainty about the future, both personal and globally, can cause stress and anxiety. Young people may face pressure to make decisions about what they do after they finish school. What will be their first job, what uni or TAFE should they choose, what if their plans don't align with the expectations of their family?

Sometimes these stressors can feel overwhelming. It's important that young people know that they don't have to wait to ask for help — that now is a good time to talk.

Having the support of educators can make a huge difference to a young person's life and their emotional wellbeing. As an educator, this means knowing when someone is struggling emotionally, and what to do to support them.

This is where the headspace NIP it in the bud framework can be a useful tool for educators when offering support to young people navigating their future. The NIP framework helps you to **Notice** changes in mood and behaviour, **Inquire** sensitively and competently, and **Provide** information to help young people access the right support.



Notice

The first step is to notice changes in a young person's behaviour. Remember that some changes can be developmentally appropriate.

As part of your assessment, consider individual factors like their temperament, sociability or disability. The way they regulate their emotions can also be influenced by their cultural, family and personal experiences, and trauma.

If they seem distressed, try to gauge how long they may have been this way. Look for signs and symptoms of emerging mental health problems to identify students who may need additional support.

Signs to look out for:

- Irritability or nervousness when talking about their future
- Active avoidance of the topic
- Difficulty making decisions about their future or finding a job
- Noticeable changes in behaviour e.g. feelings of anger, sadness, lack of focus
- No longer enjoying things that interest them
- Easily irritated and having problems with friends e.g. withdrawal, acting out
- Changes in eating or sleeping
- Turning to alcohol or drugs to cope with feelings
- Unusually stressed or worried.



Inquire

This is the opportunity to find out what's going on. It's important to gather information to assess the need for additional support or action. Create a safe space for the young person to release their emotions. Listening with empathy and compassion can be just as valuable as offering solutions.

There's no perfect way to start a conversation about mental health. It can help to do some research first and find a time and place where everyone involved is feeling safe to talk about it.

When asking, it can help to be specific about the things you've noticed. And remember, you're asking to understand, so it's important that you don't make assumptions. Understanding the young person's experience can leave you in a better place to respond in a way that helps.

Some ways to try having this conversation might be:

- "Hey, I've noticed you seem to have a lot on your mind at the moment. I'd like to hear how it's been for you."
- "I haven't seen you with the friends you usually hang out with. How have things been going?"

Things to remember:

1. Non-judgmental, active listening
2. Appropriate space, time, person
3. Be aware of body language and positioning
4. Acknowledge their experience
5. Reflect and clarify the details
6. Offer reassurance and promote hope
7. Normalise experience without minimising
8. Validate and promote help seeking (see next step: Provide)



Provide

It's about having a two-way conversation with that young person to help them decide what they might need at that time, and you as the educator helping them plan the steps of how to access it. Responding in a way that shows you can make an impact.



For more information on how to support your young person using the NIP it in the bud framework, visit headspace.org.au/nipitinthebud

They could benefit from talking to a mental health clinician, accessing headspace work & study support, reading online resources or joining a group chat to find other young people dealing with similar worries.

Based on what comes out of your conversation, you'll have a direction for what further support you may need.

Questions you could ask:

- "It sounds like thinking about future study is a bit stressful at the moment. Would you like to have a go with me at figuring out how you could approach it?"
- "Would you like me to help you figure out ways — like learning some coping skills — that you think would help you?"
- "I know of a great service that has lots of experience with this — how would you feel about us checking out their website together?"

support for educators

to help young people exploring their identity

Secondary school can be a time of self-discovery, learning and change.

This is a time when many young people start exploring their identity – it can include culture and ethnicity, beliefs and values, gender and sexuality, and more. It can be a stressful and confusing time as they learn more about themselves. Young people can feel isolated. They can feel that nobody understands what they're going through.

Sometimes these stressors can feel overwhelming. It's important that young people know that they don't have to wait to ask for help – that now is a good time to talk.

Having the support of educators can make a huge difference to a young person's life and their emotional wellbeing. As an educator this means knowing when someone is struggling emotionally, and what to do to support them.

This is where the headspace NIP it in the bud framework can be a useful tool for educators when offering support to young people exploring their identity. The NIP framework helps you to **Notice** changes in mood and behaviour, **Inquire** sensitively and competently and **Provide** information to help young people access the right support.



Notice

The first step is to notice changes in a young person's behaviour. Remember that some changes can be developmentally appropriate.

As part of your assessment, consider individual factors like their temperament, sociability or disability. The way they regulate their emotions can also be influenced by their cultural, family and personal experiences, and trauma.

If they seem distressed, try to gauge how long they may have been this way. Look for signs and symptoms of emerging mental health problems to identify students who may need additional support.

Signs to look out for:

- Noticeable changes in behaviour e.g. feelings of anger, sadness, lack of focus
- No longer enjoying things that interest them
- Easily irritated and having problems with friends e.g. withdrawal, acting out.



Inquire

This is the opportunity to gather important information to assess the need for additional support or action. Create a safe space for the young person to release their emotions. Listening with empathy and compassion can be just as valuable as offering solutions.

There's no perfect way to start a conversation about mental health. It can help to do some research first and find a time and place where everyone involved is feeling safe to talk about it.

When asking, it can help to be specific about the things you've noticed. And remember, you're asking to understand, so it's important that you don't make assumptions. Understanding the young person's experience can leave you in a better place to respond in a way that helps.

Some ways to try having this conversation might be:

- "Hey, I've noticed you seem to have a lot on your mind at the moment. I'd like to hear how it's been for you."
- "I haven't seen you with the friends you usually hang out with. How have things been going?"

Things to remember:

1. Nonjudgmental, active listening
2. Appropriate space, time, person
3. Be aware of body language and positioning
4. Acknowledge their experience
5. Reflect and clarify the details
6. Offer reassurance and promote hope
7. Normalise experience without minimising
8. Validate and promote help seeking (see provide)



Provide

It's about having a two-way conversation with that young person to help them decide what they might need at that time, and you as the educator helping them plan the steps of how to access it. Responding in a way that shows you can make an impact.

Based on what comes out of your conversation, you'll have a direction for what further support you may need.

Questions you could ask:

- "It sounds like home is a bit stressful at the moment. Would you like to have a go with me at figuring out some ways to take some of that stress away?"
- "I know of a great service that has lots of experience with this – how would you feel about us checking out their website together?"
- "Would you like me to help you figure out ways that you think would help you?"



For more information on how to support your young person using the NIP it in the bud framework, visit headspace.org.au/nipitinthebud

support for educators

to help young people on social media

Secondary school can be a challenging time for young people affected by social media.

Social media has become an integral part of the daily lives of many young people. Its constant presence can have a profound impact on mental health and wellbeing. On one hand, social media provides a platform for young people to connect with others, share interests and express themselves creatively. On the other, it can also negatively impact their mental health and wellbeing, causing feelings of anxiety, depression, and insecurity.

Sometimes these stressors can feel overwhelming. It's important that young people know that they don't have to wait to ask for help — that now is a good time to talk.

Having the support of educators can make a huge difference to a young person's life and their emotional wellbeing. As an educator, this means knowing when someone is struggling emotionally, and what to do to support them.

This is where the headspace NIP it in the bud framework can be a useful tool for educators when offering support to young people navigating relationships. The NIP framework helps you to **Notice** changes in mood and behaviour, **Inquire** sensitively and competently, and **Provide** information to help young people access the right support.



Notice

The first step is to notice changes in a young person's behaviour. Remember that some changes can be developmentally appropriate.

As part of your assessment, consider individual factors like their temperament, sociability or disability. The way they regulate their emotions can also be influenced by their cultural, family and personal experiences, and trauma.

If they seem distressed, try to gauge how long they may have been this way. Look for signs and symptoms of emerging mental health problems to identify students who may need additional support.

Signs to look out for:

- Unable to switch off from social media, distracting attention from other things
- Pressure to stay relevant and up-to-date
- Comparing their lives with those of others on social media
- Attempts to monetise their social media content
- Negative effects from cyberbullying
- Noticeable changes in behaviour e.g. feelings of anger, sadness, lack of focus
- Unusually stressed or worried.



Inquire

This is the opportunity to find out what's going on. Gather information so you can assess the need for additional support or action. Create a safe space for the young person to release their emotions. Listening with empathy and compassion can be just as valuable as offering solutions.

There's no perfect way to start a conversation about mental health. It can help to do some research first and find a time and place where everyone involved is feeling safe to talk about it.

When asking, it can help to be specific about the things you've noticed. And remember, you're asking to understand, so it's important that you don't make assumptions. Understanding the young person's experience can leave you in a better place to respond in a way that helps.

Some ways to try having this conversation might be:

- "Hey, I've noticed you seem to have a lot on your mind at the moment. I'd like to hear how it's been for you."
- "I haven't seen you with the friends you usually hang out with. How have things been going?"

Things to remember:

1. Nonjudgmental, active listening
2. Appropriate space, time, person
3. Be aware of body language and positioning
4. Acknowledge their experience
5. Reflect and clarify the details
6. Offer reassurance and promote hope
7. Normalise experience without minimising
8. Validate and promote help seeking (see next step: Provide)



Provide

It's about having a two-way conversation with that young person to help them decide what they might need at that time, and you as the educator helping them plan the steps of how to access it. Responding in a way that shows you can make an impact.

Based on what comes out of your conversation, you'll have a direction for what further support you may need.

While suggesting they take a break from social media may sound like good advice, a young person may not feel like that's an option. They may be open to finding a balance or reducing their time. There are many smaller steps they can take like turning off notifications or unfollowing accounts that make them feel bad.

Questions you could ask:

- "It sounds like being on social media is a bit stressful at the moment? Would you like to have a go with me at figuring out how you could approach it?"
- "Would you like me to help you figure out ways — like learning some coping skills — that you think would help you?"
- "I know of a great service that has lots of experience with this — how would you feel about us checking out their website together?"



For more information on how to support your young person using the NIP it in the bud framework, visit headspace.org.au/nipitinthebud



support for educators

to help young people navigate relationships

Secondary school can be a challenging time for young people making social connections.

There are many different types of relationships — those with classmates, friends and family members, to ones with romantic partners. These interactions and the way young people treat each other can greatly impact their mental health and the mental health of those around them. Relationships can bring joy, but they can also bring challenges and stress that can negatively impact a young person's emotional and social wellbeing.

Sometimes these stressors can feel overwhelming. It's important that young people know that they don't have to wait to ask for help — that now is a good time to talk.

Having the support of educators can make a huge difference to a young person's life and their emotional wellbeing. As an educator, this means recognising when someone is struggling emotionally, and what to do to support them.

This is where the headspace NIP it in the bud framework can be a useful tool for educators when offering support to young people navigating relationships. The NIP framework helps you to **Notice** changes in mood and behaviour, **Inquire** sensitively and competently, and **Provide** information to help young people access the right support.



Notice

The first step is to notice changes in a young person's behaviour. Remember that some changes can be developmentally appropriate.

As part of your assessment, consider individual factors like their temperament, sociability or disability. The way they regulate their emotions can also be influenced by their cultural, family and personal experiences, and trauma.

If they seem distressed, try to gauge how long they may have been this way. Look for signs and symptoms of emerging mental health problems to identify students who may need additional support.

Signs to look out for:

- Noticeable changes in behaviour with others e.g. feelings of anger, sadness, lack of focus
- Impact of particular relationships on behaviour and/or emotions, especially during or after an interaction with that particular person or group
- Negative impact to mental health or wellbeing after relationship breakdown
- Easily irritated and having problems with friends e.g. withdrawal, acting out
- No longer enjoying things that interest them
- Changes in eating or sleeping
- Turning to alcohol or drugs to cope with feelings
- Unusually stressed or worried.



Inquire

This is the opportunity to find out what's going on. Gather information so you can assess the need for additional support or action. Create a safe space for the young person to release their emotions. Listening with empathy and compassion can be just as valuable as offering solutions.

There's no perfect way to start a conversation about mental health. It can help to do some research first and find a time and place where everyone involved is feeling safe to talk about it.

When asking, it can help to be specific about the things you've noticed. And remember, you're asking to understand, so it's important that you don't make assumptions. Understanding the young person's experience can leave you in a better place to respond in a way that helps.

Some ways to try having this conversation might be:

- "Hey, I've noticed you seem to have a lot on your mind at the moment. I'd like to hear how it's been for you."
- "I haven't seen you with the friends you usually hang out with. How have things been going?"

Things to remember:

1. Non-judgmental, active listening
2. Appropriate space, time, person
3. Be aware of body language and positioning
4. Acknowledge their experience
5. Reflect and clarify the details
6. Offer reassurance and promote hope
7. Normalise experience without minimising
8. Validate and promote help seeking (see next step: Provide)



Provide

It's about having a two-way conversation with that young person to help them decide what they might need at that time, and you as the educator helping them plan the steps of how to access it. Responding in a way that shows you can make an impact.

Based on what comes out of your conversation, you'll have a direction for what further support you may need.

Questions you could ask:

- "It sounds like your relationship with X is a bit stressful at the moment. Would you like to have a go with me at figuring out some ways to talk to X or manage your relationship with them?"
- "Would you like me to help you to figure out some coping skills?"
- "I know of a great service that has lots of experience with this — how would you feel about us checking out their website together?"



For more information on how to support your young person using the NIP it in the bud framework, visit headspace.org.au/nipitinthebud

supporting international students

Information for education institutions,
youth services and mental health
service providers

July 2024





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International students in Australia

This document mainly refers to international students with a Student Visa (subclass 500) and who do not have access to Medicare under the reciprocal health agreement. Most international students hold this visa, which requires that they must hold Overseas Student Health Cover.

International students are a unique cohort. While research shows that international students face particular challenges that make them vulnerable to mental health challenges, their visa status usually limits their access to free and low-cost health support in Australia.

In 2022, international students studying courses in Australia totalled 478,230 for the January-June period, with the top five countries including China (28%), India (16%), Nepal (9%), Vietnam (4%) and Indonesia (3%)¹. This included those attending higher education, primary or secondary schools, Vocational and Educational Training (VET), English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS), and non-award courses. However, not all international students are in the 12-25 age range.

Most international students do not have access to Medicare and associated rebates and are unable to access free support at many mental health services. International students can access mental health support through counselling services at their education institution, but many of these services are centred around brief intervention, with many students only having access to a limited number of sessions.²

For more information about the specific mental health challenges faced by international students, see: [Guide to best practice in international student mental health](#), by English Australia.



Barriers for international students accessing support



In addition to challenges to accessing appropriate support for their mental health, there are additional barriers for international students seeking support.

Practice guides by the International Education Association of Australia (2019)³ and English Australia (2018)⁴ as well as the 'International Students and their Mental Health and Physical Safety' report (Orygen, 2020) summarise the key challenges and issues faced by international students around their mental health and help-seeking.

Key barriers can include:

- difficulties accessing services on and off campus
- cost of services can impact access and ability to attend regular sessions
- due to stigma some international students may not seek support for fear of their parents, family and community finding out
- many international students will be navigating the Australian health care system on their own, and this system may vary significantly to the health care system in their home country
- international students may be hesitant to access support early on due to concerns around privacy and confidentiality, such as fear of being seen by other students, or that their help-seeking will be recorded on their transcript or impact their visa
- English language barriers, particularly communicating concepts relating to mental health
- international students may not meet multiple thresholds of care, including tertiary services.

Supporting international students at mental health services

Navigating the system

Many international students may be new to the Australian health care system and may need additional support to understand different terms, types of practitioners and processes. Many insurance providers offer guides to understanding the healthcare system on their websites.

Services may consider developing an in-reach model with local universities and TAFEs or offering training to staff, such as youth mental health first aid, to enhance support for international students within the tertiary community.

Intake and access

In addition to an intake appointment, services may offer international students free brief intervention support through their Intake/Access team. They may even offer holding support for the young person as they await referral to an external service. There will need to be consideration when offering this support around the young person's level of risk and presenting concerns as well as ensuring that this support is culturally appropriate and safe.

Salaried mental health clinicians

Services with salaried mental health clinicians can offer international students free psychological support through their salaried workers. Support through university/student services may not always be clinically appropriate for all international students given their presentation and the level of support required. In many cases, university/student services provide brief intervention support or are focused on providing wellbeing support around academic issues.

Non-salaried mental health clinicians (private providers)

International students can access support via private practitioners and claim a rebate via their Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC) provider. To claim this rebate, they will need a Mental Health Treatment Plan. This can occur via direct or non-direct billing. However, the students' financial capacity to pay the full fee upfront or the gap fee will need to be considered.

When offering support through OSHC cover, ensure the student checks with their provider prior to a service being offered or commencing.

Consider administrative support for private practitioners to support with billing and rebates.

Accessing the OSHC maybe not be possible with certain billing platforms e.g. PRODA.

Direct billing is possible for all providers through HICAPS; however, it is also possible to set up a direct billing agreement with the provider directly. Consider consulting with the local universities in your area to identify the main insurance providers for international students at their institution. Most universities will also have an on-campus consultant for the relevant OSHC provider, who could support you to set up an easier way to bill international students.

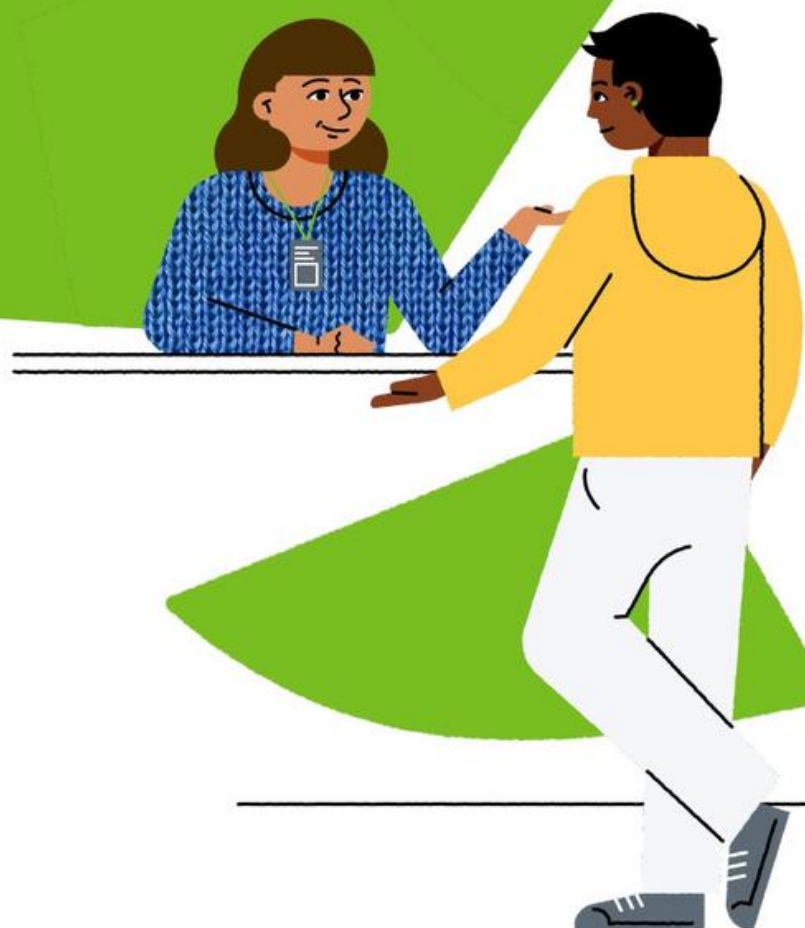
Mental Health Treatment Plan

To claim the 85% rebate through their OSHC provider, international students will need a Mental Health Treatment Plan. They may need support to understand what this is, and how to arrange this with a GP. Many insurance providers have a list of GPs who direct-bill on their website.

Accessing support through headspace (ages 12-25)

headspace helps young people aged 12-25 to access support through centres across Australia, online and phone counselling services, work and study services, and our presence in schools and universities. headspace provides holistic, personalised support with mental health, physical health (including sexual health) alcohol and other drug services, and work and study support.

There are over 160 headspace centres, including in each State and Territory, and located close to many university campuses. headspace centres provide a 'no wrong door' access to appropriate care and support.



A young person can attend any headspace centre without an appointment and will receive an intake service to discuss what help and support they need.

The headspace staff will provide advice about what services and supports they can offer, depending on their capacity and workforce disciplinary mix. This may include no cost brief interventions. They may advise the student to see a GP to obtain a Mental Health Treatment Plan so that they can access low or no cost mental health services at the headspace centre or elsewhere. Some headspace centres have GPs working at the centre on a sessional basis.

Young people can also access online and phone support through eheadspace, a national service, staffed by experienced youth mental health professionals. They may find it helpful to access the FAQs to understand more about eheadspace services. Accessing headspace's peer online chats may also be helpful, where young people can share and learn from others with similar experience, including students from a multicultural background.

The headspace website also includes information and resources to help you to understand and look after your mental health.

You can find your nearest headspace service, and information about accessing online supports, at headspace.org.au.

Accessing support for students aged 26 or over

For students aged 26 or over, it is advisable to see a GP to discuss what is happening. The GP may suggest a mental health assessment and provide a referral. There are typically telehealth or face-to-face options for getting the assessment, depending on the health service.

Students can also call Head to Health on 1800 595 212 for help accessing the local mental health services and supports that are right for them.

The Head to Health website provides more information about choosing effective care, and the types of face-to-face and digital services that you may be able to access.



Additional options for support

- If the student or young person requires general physical health support, for example for sexual health, they could see a nurse practitioner at their local health clinic. This can be a cheaper alternative to seeing a GP. However, there are limited nurse practitioners across the country.
- For international students with moderate to severe mental health concerns, it will be important to contact their local CAMHS/CYMHS/Youth Access Team, as they may be eligible for care. If not within the remit of their local service, the student will need to contact their provider to understand what could be covered under their OSHC policy.
- Many local community health centres can provide free or local cost health services including counselling, AOD support, etc, even without a Medicare card.
- PHNs can also identify the support they can provide.
- Local council or youth services may be able to offer counselling without a Medicare card.
- Providers may offer supplementary mental health programs for international students. This is outside the benefit requirements of the Deed and students should contact their provider directly for more information.

Additional mental health helpline supports for young people include:

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 (5-25 years)

ReachOut (under 25 years)

SANE Australia: 1800 187 263 (18+ years)



Translation services

Some international students may require translation services for their appointments. It is important to ask the young person if they would like a translator for any of their sessions.

There may be costs associated with accessing translation services for centres, particularly in areas where there is high demand. Approved PHN-funded mental health service providers can use TIS National's interpreting services for no charge once they have their free account set up.

Billing

Provide the student with the Medicare billing number prior to the session, so they can check with their insurance provider about how much will be covered. As OSHC mirrors Medicare, international students may only be able to access a rebate for mental health support under a MHTP when they see a psychologist, clinical psychologist, occupational therapist or mental health social worker.⁵ For GP consults, OSHC should cover 100% of the MBS fee.

To identify the relevant billing codes, please refer to the Medicare Benefits Schedule.



Offering support through Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC)

Most international students hold a Student Visa (subclass 500). Under this visa, they must hold Overseas Student Health Cover⁶ (OSHC). OSHC benefits are similar to the cover that Australian citizens, permanent residents and relevant visa holders receive under Medicare. OSHC can cover part, or all, of the cost of in-hospital and out-of-hospital medical treatments, ambulance services and some prescription medication.

What does OSHC cover?

The minimum requirements providers are required to cover are for ambulance, pharmaceuticals, out-of-hospital medical services (GP, allied health, etc.), in-hospital medical service, and some private hospital services.⁷ In addition to the minimum benefit cover, which is typically in line with the MBS scheme, health insurers may provide a *premium offering*⁸ which can cover certain extras. This is similar to how someone may have private insurance on top of accessing Medicare rebates.

It is important for the student to contact their provider to understand what, and how much, is covered. Although the Deed sets the minimum requirements for each OSHC product, some OSHC providers may pay additional benefits for each of the services covered under OSHC. Some providers also have agreements with health care providers or health facilities which aim to reduce the out-of-pocket cost for the patient for both in and out of hospital services.

Waiting periods

Some providers may have a waiting period for pre-existing conditions, pregnancy-related conditions, pre-existing psychiatric conditions, and in-hospital psychiatric services. It is important that the young person checks with their individual provider around this.

Out-of-pocket costs

International students may have an out-of-pocket cost with service providers who charge a fee that is higher than the MBS item fee or the OSHC rebate. It is important to explain this to international students, as the rebate will only apply to the amount under the MBS.

Examples

Visiting a GP to get a referral:

The MBS fee for item 23 (a GP visit) is \$39.75. An international student visits a doctor who charges \$90. The student has an OSHC that pays 100% of the MBS fee for GP consultations. This means they will get back \$39.75. Their out-of-pocket cost will be \$50.25.

Visiting a psychologist with a referral:

The MBS fee for item 80110 (clinical psychology visit) is \$129.55. An international student visits a psychologist who charges \$250. The student has an OSHC that pays 85% of the MBS fee for specialists. This means they will get back \$110. Their out-of-pocket cost will be \$140.

Please refer to Medicare Benefits Schedule for up to date rebates.

The diagram below outlines the steps an international student will take to access rebated support for their mental health through their OSHC.





OSHC providers

OSHC is offered by certain providers under a Deed of Agreement⁹ with the Department of Health and Aged Care to provide adequate health insurance to students at a reasonable cost. The registered health insurers offering OSHC are ahm OSHC, Allianz Care Australia (Peoplecare), BUPA Australia, CBHS International Health, Medibank Private, and NIB OSHC.

Further information on the OSHC policy and the process to claim can be found on the OSHC section of these providers' websites.

How to claim

This will vary across health insurers and services, but international students can either:

- **directly bill the service** (which means that the claim will automatically be sent to the health insurer, which will pay the medical provider directly)
 - Each provider will have their own process to direct bill.
 - If the service has a HICAPS or an IBA machine, it be able to directly bill the young person. However, the EFTPOS function may be needed for the young person to pay the gap fee.
- **non-directly bill the service** (which means that the international student will pay the full amount to the medical provider then use the tax invoice to submit a claim with their health insurer).
 - The time it takes for the claim to be processed can vary across health insurers.

More often than not, the student will be required to non-directly bill the service. It is important that they check with their provider about how much will be covered prior to receiving the service, so that they are aware of the costs, how they will need to claim the bill, and any out-of-pocket expenses.

Students can refer to their provider's website for more information on how to make a claim with their insurer.

Service providers can also enter into a service agreement with insurers to provide direct billed services to international students.

More information

Below are links to resources that provide additional information:

- [Privatehealth](https://www.privatehealth.gov.au) provides information on OSHC (or visit www.privatehealth.gov.au and search for OSHC)
- The Department of Health and Aged Care provides a range of resources:
 - Deed for the Provision of Overseas Student Health Cover (July 2022) <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/deed-for-the-provision-of-overseas-student-health-cover-1-july-2022>
 - Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC) fact sheet (March 2020) <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/overseas-student-health-cover-oshc-fact-sheet>
 - Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC) – Explanatory guidelines for consumers (April 2020) <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/overseas-student-health-cover-oshc-explanatory-guidelines-for-consumers>
- Medibank - Mental health services in Australia: visit www.medibank.com.au and search for 'mental health services in Australia'.
- Free Translation and Interpreting Service (TIS) for PHN-funded mental health service providers can visit: [Interpreting Services for Primary Health Network-commissioned mental health services | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#), for useful information about the program and the registration process."



Definitions

International student

A young person studying in Australia under a Student Visa (subclass 500).

Provider

In this document, when we reference the 'provider' we are referring to the OSHC insurer. Eg Medibank, Allianz, etc.

Reciprocal health agreement

Some international students may be eligible for reciprocal health care. (a temporary Medicare card)¹⁰. Students from Belgium, Finland, New Zealand, the UK, Malta, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, the Republic of Ireland, Slovenia and Sweden are eligible to have the cost of medically necessary care covered as part of this reciprocal health care agreement. However, they may still require OSHC.

Deed

Refers to the Deed for the provision of overseas student health cover (July 2022).

OSHC Overseas Student Health Cover

Is offered by certain providers under a Deed of Agreement¹¹ with the Department of Health and Aged Care to provide adequate health insurance to students at a reasonable cost. Only a small number of registered health insurers offer OSHC. OSHC is modelled after Medicare (public health insurance), and Complying Health Insurance Products (CHIPs), which is most commonly referred to as private health insurance.



References

1. Department of Education, PRISMS. (n.d.). 'International student numbers by country, by state and territory'. <https://www.education.gov.au/international-education-data-and-research/international-student-numbers-country-state-and-territory>
2. Consult with the education institution around the nature of support provided as this can vary across the sector.
3. Forbes-Mewett, H. (2019). 'Mental health and international students: issues, challenges and effective practice', Research digest 15, International Education Association of Australia (IEAA). Retrieved from www.ieaa.org.au.
4. English Australia. (2018). 'Guide to best practice in international student mental health'. <https://www.englishaustralia.com.au/documents/item/493>
5. Considerations will need to be made for GP appointments, as sometimes the GP is only aware of the presenting concern and subsequent billing code during the session.
6. https://www.ombudsman.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0025/88324/Factsheet_student_OSHC.pdf. The Department of Home Affairs is responsible for setting all visa conditions. This includes visa condition 8501: maintain adequate health insurance. For Student visa holders and applicants, OSHC is the only type of health insurance that satisfies visa condition 8501.
- 7.

Service	Rate
Ambulance	100% of the charge for emergency ambulance transport when medically necessary for admission to hospital or for emergency treatment. Coverage will vary between providers – important to confirm with the provider. This will only cover ambulance transportation to the hospital when it is an emergency. If paramedics are able to provide medical assistance on the spot and/or do not need to take the young person to hospital, the call out fee will most likely not be covered. This can vary between providers, and the call out fee will vary from state to state.
Pharmaceuticals	Up to \$50 per pharmaceutical item, prescribed and dispensed by a registered practitioner recognised by the health fund with a minimum benefit of \$500 per calendar year. This can vary between providers and is also dependent on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). Please refer to Schedule 1 b) and c) of the Deed for a more detailed explanation on the pharmaceutical benefits from 1 July 2022.
Out-of-hospital medical services eg GP, non-admitted hospital service, allied health including Clinical Psychologists, Psychologists, OTs and Social Workers, etc.	85% of the fee as listed on the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS). Some providers will cover outpatient emergency mental health treatment. All OSHC insurers must cover mental health services (both in and out of hospital) if there is a corresponding MBS item number for the service.
In-Hospital Medical Service	100% of the fee as listed on the MBS.
Private hospital services	If there is a contract between the provider and the private hospital, the amounts as specified in the contract. If there is no contract between the provider and the private hospital, then the applicable minimum benefit as set out in the Benefit Requirement Rules.

8. In addition to the minimum benefits set out in Schedule 1 of the Deed, some OSHC insurers may also offer additional services, as set out in Schedule 2 of the Deed. However, this may be offered for an additional cost.
9. The Deed for the Provision of Overseas Student Health Cover (Deed) is administered by the Department of Health and Aged Care and only registered private health insurers signed to the Deed can sell OSHC products. The Deed sets out the requirements that insurers must comply with in offering OSHC products and services. This includes the services and benefits that must be covered by all OSHC products.
10. Information for visitors to Australia on Reciprocal Health Care Agreements. <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/> and search reciprocal health care agreements when you visit Australia.
11. The Deed for the Provision of Overseas Student Health Cover (Deed) is administered by the Department of Health and Aged Care and only registered private health insurers signed to the Deed can sell OSHC products. The Deed sets out the requirements that insurers must comply with in offering OSHC products and services. This includes the services and benefits that must be covered by all OSHC products.



headspace centres and services operate across Australia, in metro, regional and rural areas, supporting young Australians and their families to be mentally healthy and engaged in their communities.



headspace would like to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First People and Traditional Custodians. We value their cultures, identities, and continuing connection to country, waters, kin and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and emerging and are committed to making a positive contribution to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, by providing services that are welcoming, safe, culturally appropriate and inclusive.



headspace is committed to embracing diversity and eliminating all forms of discrimination in the provision of health services. headspace welcomes all people irrespective of ethnicity, lifestyle choice, faith, sexual orientation and gender identity.

headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care



past headspace resources

1. how to balance screen time for a healthy headspace
2. how to manage sleep and gaming
3. myth busters: sorting fact from fiction on self-harm
4. work and study support - it's life changing
5. mythbuster: eating disorders
6. mythbuster: moving away from common myths to a better understanding of anger and anger-related difficulties in young people
7. mythbuster: sleep and young people
8. antidepressants: frequently asked questions for young people, their family and friends
9. alcohol and other drug use in young people for family and friends

how to balance screen time

(for a healthy headspace)

The internet has changed the way we work, socialise and relax, with a lot of these activities now happening online. It has added a lot of value to our lives.

Gaming can be a positive and enjoyable pastime. It can help us connect with others, feel socially included and improve our self-esteem. Healthy gaming can bring structure and routine into our lives and give us some beneficial downtime, relaxation and fun.

The research is unclear how much screen time is too much. What is clear however, is that it is important to keep a healthy balance of online and offline activities in our lives.

Not all screen time is the same. Screens and devices have become essential for us to do our work, and can be excellent learning devices. We can use them to connect with others, get support, master new skills, relax and have fun. Some online activities help us learn and be productive, whilst others provide downtime and enjoyment. However, there are other online activities that are less productive or maybe unhealthy, for example distressing violent games or if the content you are watching is not making you feel good. So not all screen time is equally valuable.

Signs that your screen time is becoming unhealthy

It is important to think about the impact that your screen time is having on your life in each of these areas below.

- **Exercise:** Research has linked screen time with an increased amount of sedentary behaviour in children and teens, and we know that being active is good for our physical and mental health. Are you still making time to move? Play sport or be more active?
- **Sleep:** is VERY important. If you are gaming when you would normally be sleeping you might need to turn off a little earlier or move your device out of your bedroom. Most young people need between 8 and 10 hours of sleep per night to be at their best, both physically and mentally.
- **Social time:** Being connected to others helps us feel good. We can connect with others online but it is important to see people we care about too. Are you making time to regularly meet up with friends and family?
- **Variety of activities:** are you keeping up with your school tasks and work? Are you doing a variety of other activities that you enjoy like reading, music or other hobbies? Do you make time to stop and eat well? Don't let other activities slip off the radar, they are important for you too.
- **Conflict, irritability and stress:** if you are getting into conflict with others about your gaming or are feeling irritable, sad or tense when you game or can't game, it might be time to think about the balance of screen time in your day.
- **Money:** are you spending more money than you can afford on new games or in-game purchases? This can become a problem for some people too.

Supporting yourself and getting help

The amount of time you spend on your screen can sneak up without you realising it. What can you do if your screen time has gotten out of balance?



Get other activities done first before you relax online. For example do some exercise, get your homework and chores done, walk the dog and spend time with your family before turning on your device. Treat it as a reward.



Decide in advance how much time you want to spend online, then set a timer to help you stay within that time limit.



Schedule in some 'no screen times' during your day. Set up times to 'unplug'.



Make mealtimes screen free.



Make sure you have offline hobbies and interests that you enjoy regularly, like seeing friends or playing sport.



Exercise while you game, by getting up and moving regularly. Doing some simple stretches can really help.



Work out how much sleep you are getting? Sleep should be a priority, as it is important for our physical and mental health.



Charge your devices outside of your room or perhaps don't have them in your bedroom at all. It will reduce the temptation to be online instead of sleeping.

If you find that your relationships, mood, school performance or work are being impacted by your continued or increased gaming use, then it might be useful to talk with someone you trust like a parent, teacher, school counsellor, family member or friend. A general practitioner (GP) is another good place to start when seeking help and information. You can also contact **eheadspace**, your local **headspace** centre, or Kids Help Line if you wanted to talk to somebody about your internet and gaming use.



With the right support, most people are able to get back to enjoying the benefits that gaming and internet use can contribute to their lives.



Where can I get help

If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace.org.au, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au



If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

The headspace Clinical Reference Group have approved this clinical resource. Fact sheets are for general information only. They are not intended to be and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific medical or health advice. While every effort is taken to ensure the information is accurate, headspace makes no representations and gives no warranties that this information is correct, current, complete, reliable or suitable for any purpose. We disclaim all responsibility and liability for any direct or indirect loss, damage, cost or expense whatsoever in the use of or reliance upon this information. 2 August 2019



how to manage

sleep and gaming

for a healthy headspace

Sleep is important for our physical and mental health. Although it varies from person to person, if you're aged between 12–17 years, you should be aiming for 8 to 10 hours sleep per night and 18–25 year olds should try to get 7 to 9 hours.

Gaming and internet use can be a positive and enjoyable pastime. It can connect us with others, help us feel more socially included and improve our self-esteem. Healthy gaming can bring structure and routine into our lives as well as provide some beneficial downtime, relaxation and fun, which is all good for our mental health.

However for some people, gaming and screen time can get in the way of having a good night's sleep, which can lead to other problems.

What happens if we don't get enough sleep?

Trouble sleeping sets the stage for many problems. When we are not getting enough sleep it is harder to manage the stress in our lives, to keep anxiety in check and it can impact our mood. We will have less energy, be more irritable and even have poorer physical health.

Sleep gives us time for our brain to process all that we have done and learned during the day, so it's important for our development and concentration too.

If you are online when you would normally be sleeping, it may be time to start reducing your screen use. Not only does too much screen time take away precious sleep, but using technology before bedtime makes it harder to fall asleep, and can also reduce the quality of sleep, which can make us feel sleepier the next day.

Looking at screens before bedtime has a stimulating effect on our minds, because of the light reflecting from the device, (often a blue coloured light). It can encourage our minds to stay alert, which can interrupt our natural body clocks and make it harder to fall asleep.

Supporting yourself and where to get help

Good sleep habits take consistent practice. It can be tough when your sleep isn't great to get back on track, but there are things you can do to enjoy gaming and continue to get a good night's sleep, don't be disheartened if it takes a while it's worth keeping at it.



Turn off video games, screens and social media at least one hour before you go to bed. Set a bedtime for your device! Maybe have a bath, watch a movie, or read a book instead. Try a mindfulness exercise if you are having trouble winding down.



Lower the brightness on your phone and computer screens at night. Some phones have a night mode which is one way to do this.



Don't charge your devices in your room overnight. It can be tempting to keep playing when we should be asleep. Use an old fashioned alarm clock instead of your smart phone.



Try to have a regular amount of sleep each night. An extra hour, every now and then, is fine – but any more can confuse your body clock. If you need more sleep, go to bed a little earlier is better than sleeping in a bit later. In fact setting a regular wake up time and sticking to it is a good way to reset our body clocks.



Try not to nap through the day as this makes it hard to get your sleep wake cycle back into rhythm.



Get some daylight and exercise through the day, but don't exercise right before bed, it can keep you awake.



Leave sometime to try a relaxation, meditation or mindfulness exercise.



Try to stay away from caffeine, cola, energy drinks, tea and even chocolate for a few hours before you go to sleep. Maybe try herbal tea instead.



Where can I get help?

If you think gaming or your internet use is getting in the way of a good night's sleep you can talk to someone you trust like a parent, teacher, school counsellor, friend or family member. A general practitioner (GP) is another good place to start when seeking help and information about sleep. You can also contact **eheadspace**, your local **headspace** centre, or Kids Help Line if you would like to talk to somebody about your internet use or sleep.



The good news is that with some strategies and the right support, most people are able to enjoying the benefits that gaming and internet use can contribute to their lives, without it interrupting their sleep.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace.org.au, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au



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MythBuster: Sorting fact from fiction on self-harm



Mythbuster: Sorting fact from fiction on self-harm

What are the most common myths surrounding self-harm?

There are many myths surrounding self-harm, which makes it hard to separate fact from fiction. It can be very confusing and difficult to understand, both to the person who is self-harming and to their friends and family (13). Raising the topic of self-harm can bring up uncomfortable feelings including fear, guilt, and shame (13,19).

Some of the most common myths around self-harm are:

- "Self-harm is an attempt at suicide"
- "It's just attention seeking"
- "It's an 'emo'/'goth' thing"
- "If you self-harm it means you're mentally ill"
- "People who self-harm have borderline personality disorder"

These are myths, not fact. But even as myths, they can be very powerful and impact not only on young people who self-harm, but also on those around them.

MYTH: "Self-harm is an attempt at suicide"

Often what frightens people most about self-harm is the assumption that the person is trying to kill themselves. **This is not true. In the vast majority of cases, self-harm is a coping mechanism, not a suicide attempt** (2-3,12). It may seem counter-intuitive, but in many cases, people use self-harm as a way to stay alive rather than end their life (2,13,17).

It is important to understand that self-harm is mostly an attempt to *hurt*, not to kill oneself. However there is a relationship between self-harm and suicide that does need to be considered. Sometimes people injure themselves more seriously than they intend to, and this can put their life at risk. Young people who self-harm are also at a much higher risk of attempting suicide at some time in the future than those who don't self-harm, even if they're not suicidal at the time (7). This doesn't mean they *will* attempt suicide, but rather that their *risk* is higher. It is important to encourage anyone who is self-harming to seek help from a health professional to address any underlying emotional problems (e.g. depression or anxiety).

MYTH: "It's just attention seeking"

Self-harm is not about attention seeking. **Most young people who self-harm go to great lengths to draw as little attention as possible to their behaviour by self-harming in private and by harming parts of the body that are not visible to others** (12-13).

Even those closest to the young person are often unaware of it. One study found that the rates of self-harm reported by young people were three times higher than their parents estimated (20). Concealing self-harm can be a big burden for young people and can affect their day-to-day life. For example, it can determine what clothes they can wear (to cover up cuts or scars), limit their activities (e.g. not going to the beach or swimming) or cause them to avoid physical or intimate relationships in which someone might become aware of their self-harm (13).

Rarely, threats of self-harm or actual self-harm might be used to achieve a certain aim. This is often called 'manipulative behaviour'. **Most of the time people self-harm in an attempt to change how they are feeling, rather than trying to get attention from, or manipulate, other people** (2,11-12,17,21).

MYTH: "It's a fashion, a trend or an 'emo' thing"

Self-harm is not a new behaviour that arrived with a certain subculture or 'trend' amongst young people. Mental health professionals have been studying and treating self-harm for decades (e.g. 22). Despite this, self-harm has been and continues to be associated with certain subcultures resulting in stereotyped beliefs that only 'certain kinds of people' self-harm. Recently the 'emo' trend has received attention as being associated with depression, self-harm and suicide (23). **A national inquiry into self-harm among young people in the UK found no evidence to suggest it was associated with any particular youth subculture** (13).

The term 'emo' was originally used to describe a style of music known as 'emotive rock', which used expressive and often confessional lyrics. Today the term is used more broadly to describe a fashion style and personality traits such as being emotional, sensitive, shy, introverted, or angst-ridden (24).

MYTH: "If someone self-harms, they must have a mental illness or a personality disorder"

Self-harm is a behaviour or symptom, not a disorder or an illness. Self-harming behaviour is strongly suggestive of an underlying psychological or emotional problem (7,25), but many young people who self-harm do not meet the criteria for any specific mental illness diagnosis.

| What is self-harm?

Self-harm occurs when people deliberately hurt their bodies.

The most common type of self-harm among young people is cutting (1). Other types include burning the skin until it marks or bleeds, picking at wounds or scars, self-hitting and pulling hair out by the roots (2). At the more extreme end of the spectrum, self-harm can include breaking bones, hanging and deliberately overdosing on medication (3).

There are other deliberate behaviours that can be harmful to one's health that are not normally included in the definition of self-harm. These include self-starving, binge drinking, smoking or other drug use and dangerous driving.

How many young people self-harm?

Research suggests that 6-7% of young Australians (aged 15-24) have self-harmed in any 12-month period, while over 12% report having done so at some point in their life (4-5).

Self-harm is more common after the onset of puberty (6). The average age at which self-harm first occurs is 12-14 years (7) and, in adolescents, it is more common among girls than boys (8). However, self-harm can occur in anyone, regardless of their age, gender, socio-economic status or culture/ethnicity.

Self-harm often goes unnoticed. It is commonly done in private and most young people who self-harm don't seek help or come to the attention of health services (e.g. 1,4,9).

Self-harm is more common than people may think.
About 12% of young people in Australia report having self-harmed at some point in their life.

Why do people self-harm?

Most self-harm is in response to intense pain, distress, or overwhelming negative feelings, thoughts or memories (e.g. 2,10-13). Although young people who self-harm might say that they want to die, the driving force behind their behaviour is often more to do with expressing their distress and desire to escape from troubling situations (14). It is usually a build up of negative experiences/stresses rather than any one single event or experience that triggers self-harm in young people (15).

Some common triggers of self harm are (14):

- Difficulties or disputes with parents, other family members or peers
- School or work problems
- Difficulties with boyfriends or girlfriends
- Physical health problems
- Depression
- Bullying
- Low self esteem
- Sexual problems
- Alcohol and drug abuse

Young people who self-harm may feel that it helps to relieve their distress and bring some sense of relief in the short term (12). **However this feeling of relief typically doesn't last because the problems causing the distress are not being addressed.** For some young people self-harm is a 'once off' event, but for others (over 50% who self-harm) it can become repetitive (16-18). Most young people who repeatedly self-harm say they never thought they would come to rely on it as a way to cope with their feelings (13). Many realise that, in the long term, self-harm is not an effective coping mechanism, but find it hard to give up. Often, they are not able to find other ways to cope with their distress (e.g. talking with somebody they can trust).

Some young people who repeatedly self-harm may experience the behaviour as being 'addictive' (e.g. 13). It is important to respect this viewpoint, and understand that, for these young people, **recovery is not as simple as 'just stopping'**. Often a person can stop self-harming only when they have developed more effective ways of coping with their distress. This process usually takes time. Initially the focus may need to be on helping the young person to reduce their level of self-harm rather than asking them to give it up immediately. However, with time and appropriate support, many young people do recover and stop self-harming (13).

Mythbuster: Sorting fact from fiction on self-harm

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is the only mental health disorder for which self-harm is a diagnostic feature. As a result, young people are sometimes labeled as having BPD simply because they self-harm (19). In fact, only a small minority of young people who self-harm meet the diagnostic criteria.

Self-harming behaviour alone should never result in the assumption that a person has BPD (10). BPD should only be diagnosed following a comprehensive assessment (26).

Other unhelpful ways of talking about self-harm

As well as being influenced by common myths, people's understanding of self-harm is influenced by the way it is talked about in the media and in day-to-day conversation. Self-harm is often talked about in unhelpful ways, such as "a trend" or "an epidemic". These sorts of sweeping statements should be avoided - they are inaccurate and potentially harmful (see 27).

Unhelpful Language: "Self-harm is ..."	The Facts
"....an epidemic"	There is no evidence to support the idea that the rates of self-harm among young people warrant it being described as 'an epidemic'. Using such language only creates widespread panic and alarm that can be very frightening, particularly for parents.
"...a trend"	Self-harm is not 'a trend'. It is a serious problem that often indicates serious emotional distress.

What effect do these myths have on young people who are self-harming and their families?

The myths that surround self-harm contribute to the guilt, shame and fear experienced by most young people who self-harm. They are very aware of the labels that might be placed on them if anyone finds out about their self-harm (9,13) and often fear being labelled (e.g. as an "attention-seeker", "crazy", "stupid") by others. These fears can drive their efforts to keep their self-harm a secret (9,13). Young people also feel a tremendous amount of guilt and shame about their self-harm. This can make it very hard for them to find the information and support they need to find better ways to cope with their emotional distress and problems.

Young people who do seek support for their self-harm are most likely to turn to friends or family first (4,9). If the person they turn to believes the myths about self-harm, they are more likely to respond in a negative or unhelpful way. This might include not taking the self-harm seriously (e.g. it's just "a phase" or "attention seeking"), getting angry with the person, or panicking and jumping to the conclusion that the person is suicidal when this may not be the case. **If a young person's initial attempts to seek support are negative or unhelpful this might add to their distress and their self-harm might become more frequent or serious.**

Parents often experience intense emotional responses when learning that their child is self-harming, including shock, embarrassment, shame, guilt and confusion. Many report feeling that they have 'failed' their child in some way, or fear how other people might react to learning of the self-harm (e.g. "you're bad parents" or "your child is crazy"). As a result, some parents are reluctant to confide in friends or family about what they are going through (28-29). This adds to their sense of isolation and can leave them feeling overwhelmed. Because of these sorts of experiences, parents often only seek help for their child when the self-harm escalates and a crisis occurs (29). Delays in seeking help can have serious consequences for the young person and their family. If there are psychological problems underlying the self-harm, it is best to seek help early so that appropriate support and treatment can be provided.

Beyond the myths – how can young people who self-harm be helped and supported?

It can be difficult to know what to do if you are worried about someone who is, or may be, self-harming. It is perfectly natural to feel overwhelmed. Try to acknowledge your feelings, whatever they may be, and deal with them (e.g. talk to somebody about how you're feeling, take some time out to clear your head). One of the most helpful things that you can do is to remain calm. To do this you need to get your own emotions under control first.

If you are self-harming it's important to remember that there is a lot of support out there. If you're not ready to talk to someone you know about your self-harm, you can talk to a doctor (GP) or call a confidential helpline (e.g. Lifeline 13 11 14). It can also help to look up websites that are designed for young people – such as headspace.org.au and reachout.com.au – for reliable information, advice and support. You may also be interested in some of the tips listed on the next page.

Mythbuster: Sorting fact from fiction on self-harm

Tips for supporting somebody who is self-harming:

- **Don't** ignore or dismiss your concerns
- **Do** educate yourself about self-harm: see below for a list of helpful resources
- **Do** try to manage your own emotions. This will help you to approach the person in a calm and non-threatening manner.
- **Don't** panic and jump to conclusions about why the person is self-harming. Don't assume you know the reason - instead ask about the feelings that are driving their self-harm.
- **Do** ask the person directly if they are feeling suicidal (see accompanying mythbuster: 'MYTH: Asking young people about suicidal thoughts or behaviours will only put ideas in their heads'; 30)
- **Do** encourage the person to get support from a health professional: getting help earlier means any underlying problems that do exist can be detected and the person can get appropriate support.
- **Do** recognise that their self-harm may be one of their only coping tools and that asking them to give it up can be very frightening. Re-assure the person that you don't expect them to stop today.
- **Don't** make ultimatums or try to force the person to stop: this is likely to make things worse.
- **Don't** agree to keep secrets: it is possible that the person's safety is at risk from their self-harm. This means you may have to tell somebody else to keep them safe. If this happens only tell the people who need to know (e.g. a counsellor/teacher/parent).
- **Do** try and be as open with the person as possible: If you need to tell somebody else about their self-harm to keep them safe, try to speak to them about this first. It is important that they don't feel that things are being taken out of their control and that everyone will suddenly know about their self-harm.
- **Do** look after yourself: consider whether you need to get some advice and support for yourself (e.g. from a helpline/ counsellor or a friend).

What if the person is not ready/willing to get help?

Encourage the person to call a confidential helpline or go online to find information and support (headspace.org.au and reachout.com.au are helpful websites designed for young people). Sometimes it can be easier to talk to somebody not involved in the situation to get a 'fresh' perspective.

If you are concerned about somebody's safety, call Lifeline confidentially on 13 11 14 to speak to a counsellor. In the case of an emergency call 000 or bring the person to the nearest emergency department.

Tips – some self-help techniques that may be helpful

Young people who self-harm say that finding ways to distract themselves when they get the urge to self-harm is very important to their recovery (13). These may not work for everyone but it can be helpful to give them a try to see if you can find one that might work for you:

- Using a red pen to mark the skin instead of cutting
- Hitting a punch bag to vent anger or frustration
- Exercising
- Making lots of noise (e.g. with an instrument, banging pots and pans)
- Writing your negative feelings on a piece of paper and then ripping it up
- Scribbling on a large piece of paper with a red pen
- Writing a diary or a journal
- Talking to a friend (not necessarily about self-harm)
- Doing a collage/artwork
- Going online and looking at self-help websites

Using 'substitute forms of self-harm' can also be helpful, e.g.:

- Rubbing ice on the skin instead of cutting
- Putting elastic bands on the wrists and flicking them instead of cutting
- Eating a chilli

It's good to learn some things that you can do to help yourself, but it's important to remember that helping yourself doesn't mean you have to go it alone. Talking

to someone you trust about what you're going through can make things a lot easier. This might be a friend, family member, teacher, youth worker, counsellor or GP.

You can also call a confidential helpline.

Want to know more?

For more reliable information about self-harm including factsheets, young people's stories of their experiences of self-harming and recovery, and information on how and where to get help check out the following websites: headspace.org.au and reachout.com.au

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists Guidelines on Self-harm are also helpful to young people and their carers (<http://www.ranzcp.org/resources/clinical-practice-guidelines.html>)

For practical tips on how to approach somebody who may be self-harming read the **Mental Health First Aid Guidelines for Non-Suicidal Self-Injury** (www.mhfa.com.au)

Worried the person might be thinking of suicide? Read the headspace mythbuster: 'MYTH: Asking young people about suicidal thoughts or behaviours will only put ideas in their head' (<http://www.headspace.org.au/knowledge-centre/>)

Mythbuster: Sorting fact from fiction on self-harm

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For more details about **headspace** visit www.headspace.org.au

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work and study support – it's life changing

How engaging in work and study support leads to improved mental health outcomes for young people

The information included in this resource has been written for all headspace staff, to ensure we have consistent language to explain the importance of work and study in the lives of young people. Our aim is for all young people who engage with headspace to be asked about their work and study situation and offered support to talk about their needs in this space. Prioritising engagement with work and study support as part of a young person's mental health journey is core to delivering the headspace model.

The onset of mental ill-health commonly occurs during adolescence and can affect a young person's ability to engage in work or study. This can significantly impact their development and future. Reducing the length of time a young person is disengaged from work or study can positively impact their mental health and wellbeing.

- Working or studying provides purpose, connection, and structure.
- Engaging in meaningful work or study is a critical protective factor for good mental health.
- It leads to improved resilience, self-esteem, social connection, and inclusion.

Work and study support assists young people to identify and reach their work or study goals, so it is essential that vocational considerations are included when working with young people across the continuum of mental health and regardless of their mental health presentation.



how work and study support leads to improved mental health

Increases connection

Supporting young people to work or study helps them sustain or build their connections with people, places, and routines. Reducing their isolation assists young people to deal with challenges and broadens their perspective and sense of belonging. Vocational Specialists provide a point of connection and support and also work with young people to build connections through meeting their goals.

Provides hope

Future-focused support counteracts worry and encourages optimism. Young people can feel anxious about their future, work and study support encourages hopefulness and a positive outlook. This can help them to identify meaningful goals and plans rather than feeling stuck and helpless.

Reduces stigma

Alongside stigma from their community or workplaces, young people can also experience self-stigma when dealing with mental ill health. Supporting them to explore their options and see possibilities beyond self-imposed or discriminatory limitations reduces stigma and supports mental health recovery.

Provides sense of purpose

Young people with mental ill-health often identify working or studying as one of their main treatment goals. Supporting them to reach these goals by providing a framework for structure, routine, and purposeful engagement can help with motivation and keep them engaged with mental health support and other activities.

Improves confidence

Through work and study support, young people can explore access to a meaningful role, improve their self-efficacy and achieve a sense of accomplishment. They do this while developing skills, practising strategies that support good mental health, and growing their confidence in new and challenging situations.

Increases resilience

Work and study support helps young people identify interests, strengths and values, increases their self-awareness, and supports their decision-making skills. Bolstering self-efficacy and skills for navigating setbacks can have a significant impact on mental health and wellbeing. It can also assist young people to identify issues such as excessive demands, unreasonable work conditions or bullying, and find appropriate and supportive solutions.

Builds skills

Through work and study support, young people develop their career goals, source education and training opportunities and acquire the job search skills they need to find meaningful work or study. Skills developed through this support are often transferable to other areas of life including managing stressors, anxiety, or difficult situations.

Empowers

When young people are successfully engaged in work or study, it can foster a sense of achievement and boost self-confidence. Empowerment comes from achievements such as having a plan, earning money, and overcoming the barriers that might have arisen due to mental ill-health. When feeling empowered young people feel more able to face challenges, and manage any unexpected change.



how headspace approaches work and study support

Early intervention

Responding early when a young person is not engaged in or at risk of disengaging from work or study is important. The longer someone is not working or studying the harder it is for them to re-engage. This aligns with the headspace model of early intervention for young people with mental ill-health. Combining work and study and mental health support early in a young person's journey will have a positive impact on their wellbeing and future.

Strengths based and future focused

Identifying and working towards a young person's goals is the driving factor in their work and study journey. Focusing on the strengths of a young person is vital to developing an appropriate plan and allows identification of any areas where they may need additional support.

Person centred

Work and study support focuses on understanding the young person and allowing them to determine their own journey with working or studying. What are their goals, strengths, and challenges? The work is driven by the young person, without judgement or pressure to 'just get any job'. This leads to a greater sense of self-efficacy and the opportunity to celebrate successes along the way.

Supportive relationship

Building rapport with a young person is a crucial skill used by Vocational Specialists. Listening, advocating, supporting, and encouraging them through the challenges of employment, education or career planning are vital elements of a supportive relationship and achieving good outcomes for the young person. A Vocational Specialist plays an important role amongst the other supports in a young person's life. They can be an independent sounding board and someone to explore options with in an open and constructive manner.

Focus on application of skills

Assisting a young person to identify and practise the skills required for successful engagement in work or study is important. Skills like speaking confidently about themselves, feeling comfortable in new situations, asking for help, or having difficult conversations in the workplace are all examples of supporting young people to sit out of their comfort zone to build capacity and confidence. These skills are transferable and can be taken into other areas of a young person's life.

Motivational interviewing

Motivational interviewing is a technique used to support young people to explore their opportunities and barriers when considering their work and study goals. This can be used to help them identify and understand issues like reduced motivation or procrastination.



Experiential learning

Learning new skills occurs most effectively through real-world practice. Engagement with work and study may cause stress or anxiety; however, receiving structured support during these times can help to build skills and positively contribute to addressing mental ill-health. Having the support of a Vocational Specialist if a young person is unsuccessful in gaining employment also assists in the learning process.

Belief that working or studying are possible despite mental ill-health

An important principle of work and study support is that everyone is capable of working or studying. If a young person has mental ill-health, they might also have a negative view about the possibilities for their future. This feeling is often exacerbated by people around them who are also concerned. However, engagement in work and study support – with the belief that goals can be reached – can have a positive impact and support recovery.

Let's bust some myths

Myth: We should focus on ways to manage anxiety before thinking about referring a young person for work and study support.

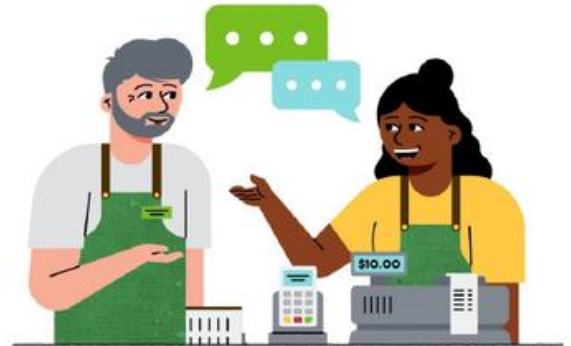
headspace aims for young people to be mentally healthy and engaged in their communities. To do this it is important to think of the young person as a whole person, which includes their work and study goals. Asking about work and study at intake/assessment or during ongoing support and encouraging uptake can be incorporated into mental health interventions, and prompt a referral for specific work and study support. If working or studying is identified as one of the young person's main goals, we need to support this as they might disengage from clinical support if this goal is not acknowledged.

Mental health support has multiple mental health benefits across the mental health continuum and is a key component of functional recovery. Supporting a young person to engage with work and study early reduces the barriers and stressors that impact on mental ill-health. The longer the gap they have without meaningful work and study, the bigger the impact it has on their lives.

Myth: If a young person is struggling to get out of bed each day, they won't attend a new job. Failing will worsen their mood and increase their risk.

Young people can engage in work and study even if they have symptoms of mental ill-health. It is developmentally appropriate for young people to strive and plan for their future and their support networks can encourage this, so it is important we ask about their goals. Leaving work and study considerations to the end or as an end point of mental health support can mean that the young person has a longer time without meaningful work and study engagement and the benefits these bring. It might help them build a routine or have a purpose that will encourage them to embrace each day.

Tailored, youth-led work and study support meets a young person where they are at, while guidance, and normalising unsuccessful attempts to engage with work or study can help them develop skills and resilience to navigate the world of work in the future.



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For more information on headspace Work and Study support options visit headspace.org.au/workandstudy

Resources to support young people through their work and study journey can be found on our website or through the headspace online account. Vocational Specialists from Work and Study Online or Work and Study Centres are also available to discuss resources and tools that support young people to reach their work and study goals.



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National Youth Mental Health Foundation

MythBuster: Eating Disorders

"Eating disorders aren't that serious – they're just diets gone wrong..." and other unhelpful myths.



MythBuster: Eating Disorders

"Eating disorders aren't that serious – they're just diets gone wrong..."
and other unhelpful myths.

Who is this MythBuster for?

This MythBuster is written for young people and their families and friends. It may also be of interest to health and other professionals working with young people. The first section summarises key facts about eating disorders and young people. The second section describes the common myths about eating disorders and provides evidence that counters these myths.

Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are among the most serious and misunderstood of all mental disorders. A number of myths and stereotypes exist about eating disorders that can be potentially damaging to young people affected by them and to their families.

This MythBuster aims to dispel these myths and present an evidence-based understanding of how eating disorders can affect young people and how their needs can be met.

What are eating disorders?

A person has an eating disorder when their attitudes to food, weight, body size or shape lead to marked changes in their eating or exercise behaviours which interfere with their life and relationships (1). There are six main types of eating disorders¹: anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder, avoidant/restricted food intake disorder, other specified feeding or eating disorder, and unspecified feeding or eating disorder (2).

Bulimia nervosa involves an often-secretive cycle of 'binge' eating (i.e. eating large amounts of food in a short space of time, accompanied by feeling a loss of control) followed by 'compensatory' behaviours (i.e. 'compensating' or trying to get rid of the food by vomiting, abusing laxatives, over-exercising or fasting). **These behaviours are usually very distressing to the person as they are experienced as being out of their control and often bring on intense feelings of guilt and shame** (3-4). Bulimia is no less serious when a person uses over-exercising or fasting to try to lose weight, rather than vomiting or abusing laxatives (5-7).

Anorexia nervosa involves a) the restriction of energy intake compared to the body's requirements, leading to significantly low body weight, b) a distorted body image (i.e. the way a person sees their body is distorted, making them think they are bigger than they actually are) and c) an intense fear of gaining weight (2). Younger people with anorexia nervosa may present with atypical features including denial of a "fear of fat" (2, p.341). Amenorrhea (i.e. the absence of three or more menstrual cycles in a row) is not required to diagnose anorexia nervosa in postmenarcheal females (i.e. women who have begun to have periods) under the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) criteria (2).

Binge eating disorder involves repeated episodes of binge eating where 'excessive' or significantly larger amounts of food are consumed than normally would be over a short period (2). These episodes are accompanied by a sense of lack of control, such as feeling unable to stop oneself from eating or unable to control how much is eaten (2). The person experiences marked distress due to their binge eating (2). Binge eating episodes may also be associated with feelings of disgust, shame, guilt and depression (2). Compensatory behaviours (see bulimia nervosa above) are not present in binge eating disorder (2).

1. Pica and rumination disorder are not covered in this MythBuster

MythBuster: Eating Disorders

"Eating disorders aren't that serious – they're just diets gone wrong..." and other unhelpful myths.

Avoidant/restricted food intake disorder is a new disorder in the DSM-5. It involves an eating or feeding disturbance characterised by a persistent failure to meet appropriate nutritional/energy intake needs which is not better accounted for by food availability or a culturally sanctioned practice (2). This symptom must be associated with one or more of the following: significant weight loss, significant nutritional deficiency, dependence on nutritional supplements, or significant problems in a person's day-to-day life resulting from their symptoms (2). Unlike other eating disorders, avoidant/restricted food intake disorder does not involve body image disturbance or fear of becoming fat. In adolescents, food avoidance or restriction may be associated with other emotional and social difficulties (2).

Other specified feeding or eating disorder is a category that may apply when someone has symptoms that do not quite fit the criteria for another eating disorder, but that are causing significant distress or interfering in their day-to-day life – for example their work or studies, physical health or relationships.

Examples of this category include when someone is experiencing all the symptoms of bulimia nervosa or binge eating disorder, but the frequency or duration of binge eating episodes is too low to meet criteria; or all the symptoms of anorexia nervosa where there has been weight loss but weight is within the normal range (2).

In contrast, unspecified feeding or eating disorder is diagnosed when the particular reason that the person does not meet criteria for another eating disorder is not specified. The diagnosis is often made when there is not enough information available to make a more specific diagnosis (2).

The most common myths about eating disorders include:

1. Myths about the seriousness of eating disorders

Eating disorders are often described as being a 'trend', 'phase', 'attention-seeking' or simply 'a diet gone wrong'. These myths are damaging as they can fuel the belief that people experiencing eating disorders are responsible for their symptoms and could simply 'stop' their behaviour if they really wanted to, or tried hard enough (8).

2. Myths about who can be affected by eating disorders

Stereotypes about the 'types of people' who develop eating disorders are common (e.g. only females are affected; 8-12). These stereotypes are harmful as they can increase the likelihood that eating disorders will go unnoticed in young people who don't 'fit the mould' (13). They can also make it less likely that these young people will seek support.

3. Myths about treatments for, and recovery from, eating disorders

Beliefs that eating disorders are 'untreatable' are still widespread. This adds to a sense of hopelessness that is sometimes associated with eating disorders – not just in the community, but also among health professionals. However, evidence shows that with support and appropriate treatment, most young people recover from their symptoms (14,15-16). **Early treatment is associated with better outcomes** (17-19).

MythBuster: Eating Disorders

"Eating disorders aren't that serious – they're just diets gone wrong..." and other unhelpful myths.

Busting the myths...

MYTH: "Eating disorders are a fashion, trend, phase or attention-seeking"

Although some young people might try dieting or other weight-control behaviours because of the influence of their friends, eating disorders don't develop because a person wants to be fashionable. They are serious illnesses that can severely disrupt every aspect of a person's life, including their physical health (20-21).

In adolescence, the health risks can be even more serious as an eating disorder can impact on physical growth and development (22-23).

Similarly, eating disorders are not about 'attention-seeking'. In fact, people often go to great lengths to hide their behaviours from those around them (10). If someone does notice and approaches them about their weight or behaviour, a person experiencing an eating disorder will often deny that they have a problem (10,22). This may be even more common among adolescents than adults, as adolescents tend to experience greater denial of symptoms and less desire for support (24).

MYTH: "An eating disorder is just a diet gone wrong"

Eating disorders often begin with dieting (8,22-23,25-26), but they are more than just 'a diet gone wrong'. When a person has an eating disorder they can experience a range of distressing and disabling feelings and behaviours, not just restrictive eating, but bingeing, purging (i.e. vomiting or abusing laxatives) and/or excessive exercising. These behaviours are often experienced as being out of the person's control. Other mental health difficulties, such as depression and substance use, are also common (19,27).

MYTH: "Eating disorders don't affect males"

Eating disorders are more common among young women than men. However, they also affect males. Based on the diagnostic criteria in the DSM-5, about 15% of eating disorders diagnosed in adolescents are in males (28). Specifically, it's estimated that approximately 7% of cases of anorexia nervosa, 13% of cases of bulimia nervosa, 20% of cases of binge eating disorder and 29% of cases of other specified feeding or eating disorder occur in adolescent males (28). Some males experiencing eating disorders may be driven by the desire to lose weight, while others may be driven by the desire to gain weight in order to achieve an ideal muscular, trim physique (29).

There is evidence that it takes longer for males to receive professional support and treatment than females (30),

which may be explained in part by this myth. Typically it is only when symptoms become severe that a diagnosis of an eating disorder is considered in boys and young men (29). Males may also be even more motivated to hide their symptoms due to the stigma associated with having what they or others perceive to be 'a female disorder' (29).

MYTH: "Eating disorders only affect the wealthy and Westerners"

Stereotypes still exist that eating disorders predominantly affect people from affluent or privileged families (11-12,20,31) and those from Western cultures (e.g. Australia, USA, Europe) where the 'ideal beauty' involves being thin and toned (8,10-11,19). However evidence shows that **anyone can develop an eating disorder, regardless of ethnicity or social class (8,11-12,20,22,31).**

MYTH: "It's easy to tell if someone has an eating disorder because they will be very underweight"

You can't tell just by looking at someone whether or not they have an eating disorder. A person experiencing an eating disorder may be underweight, within a healthy weight range, or overweight (2).

MYTH: "Families are to blame for eating disorders"

A particularly harmful myth is that eating disorders only occur in certain types of families and are 'caused' by certain parenting styles (18). In the past, parents were often prevented from having any involvement in their child's treatment as they were seen as 'part of the problem' (18). Unfortunately, many parents still report feeling 'blamed' for their child's eating disorder (e.g. 32). There is no evidence to suggest that eating disorders are caused by particular parenting styles (10,18,33).

Parents and families should be seen as part of the solution to overcoming an eating disorder, not the problem. Clinical best-practice guidelines state that family members should normally be included in the treatment of adolescents with eating disorders (34-36).

MYTH: "The solution to eating disorders is simple – just stop"

Supporting someone experiencing an eating disorder can sometimes be challenging. It can be difficult to understand why the person can't change their thoughts about themselves or stop their behaviour and return to 'normal'. Unfortunately, recovery is not as simple as 'just stopping'. People experiencing eating disorders need to be supported to learn how to think more realistically about their body and more positively about themselves, and to learn techniques for managing difficult emotions without turning to food or weight-control behaviours.

MythBuster: Eating Disorders

"Eating disorders aren't that serious – they're just diets gone wrong..." and other unhelpful myths.

Busting the myths on weight loss...

As well as busting the myths surrounding eating disorders in general, it is important to tackle some unhelpful myths about 'what works' for weight loss and what effect different weight loss strategies can have on your health. People may believe that unhealthy weight loss strategies work and/or that they're not really a serious problem (37). This is a myth, as evidence shows that not only are many of these techniques ineffective ways to lose weight, but they can be very damaging to the person's physical and psychological health (3-7,38).

MYTH: "There is no such thing as too much exercise"

Exercising excessively is not good for you physically or emotionally. Over-exercising can cause serious health problems, including osteoporosis (brittle bones), lowered hormones, heart problems and permanent damage to joints and tendons (39). It can also lead to strong feelings of guilt and depressed mood when exercising goals are not met, or when a person is unable to exercise (40).

MYTH: "Vomiting or using laxatives gets rid of the calories consumed by eating"

Even when done immediately after eating, vomiting does not get rid of all of the calories a person has consumed. Studies have shown that vomiting only gets rid of about half of the calories consumed (41). It also encourages over-eating (41). Similarly, laxatives don't prevent calories being absorbed, so they have almost no impact on weight loss. Both chronic vomiting and laxative abuse can cause serious health problems that can be life-threatening (42-43). Chronic vomiting can cause tearing or bleeding in the oesophagus (the 'food pipe'), digestive problems and dental damage. Abusing laxatives can cause serious problems with bowel functioning, such as bloating, gas, pain and loss of control over bowel movements (44). Both of these behaviours can cause electrolyte imbalances that can be life-threatening (44-45).

MYTH: "Fad dieting is a good way to lose weight"

Fad diets (or any short-term weight loss strategy) might work in the short-term, but in the long-run, they usually lead to weight gain, not loss (38). This is because dieting slows down your body's metabolism, making it harder to burn off calories consumed. Dieting also increases a person's pre-occupation with food and craving, **such that they may actually end up eating more than they would if they were not dieting.**

So what does this all mean?

- Eating disorders are serious, damaging and potentially life-threatening illnesses – they need to be taken seriously, not trivialised.
- There are many unhelpful stereotypes about people experiencing eating disorders. We need to be aware of these stereotypes and challenge them wherever possible.
- Eating disorders are complex conditions that are caused by a combination of factors. It is misguided to blame someone for an eating disorder - either the individual affected or their family. Eating disorders are not a lifestyle choice.
- **Recognising the symptoms or warning signs of eating disorders is critical, as the earlier a problem is detected and treated, the better the outcome for the young person** (see the **headspace** factsheet on Eating Disorders for more information on early warning signs – headspace.org.au. Early treatment increases the chances of fully recovering, and recovering faster.

Getting support

Worried that you may be at-risk of developing, or have, an eating disorder?

It is strongly recommended that you consult a health professional if you feel you may have symptoms of an eating disorder. In addition to professional support, there is a useful online program called 'Overcoming Disordered Eating' (access at cci.health.wa.gov.au and go to resources).

There are other self-help resources available (e.g. *Overcoming Bulimia Nervosa and Binge-Eating: New Revised Edition*; 46), however it's not recommended to try to treat an eating disorder using self-help alone – getting professional support as early as possible is important.

The best place to start is to contact your GP or your nearest **headspace** centre (headspace.org.au).

MythBuster: Eating Disorders

"Eating disorders aren't that serious – they're just diets gone wrong..."
and other unhelpful myths.

Worried about someone who may have/be developing an eating disorder?

It's important that you approach the person about your concerns and seek advice and support from a health professional. The Mental Health First Aid Guidelines on Eating Disorders provide helpful evidence-based advice on the best steps to follow in approaching the person about your concerns, encouraging them to get professional support and looking after yourself (mhfa.com.au). You can also call the Butterfly Foundation's helpline 1800 334 673 to speak to somebody about your concerns or email: support@thebutterflyfoundation.org.au.

Even if the young person denies that they have a problem, it is very important to seek support from a health professional about your concerns. The best place to start is to contact your GP or your nearest **headspace** centre (headspace.org.au). Sometimes, the process of looking for support can be frustrating, it's important to be persistent in your efforts. There is help out there.

Supporting somebody who may be experiencing an eating disorder?

Resources that may be helpful are available on The Butterfly Foundation's website (thebutterflyfoundation.org.au) and the Victorian Centre of Excellence in Eating Disorders' website (ceed.org.au).

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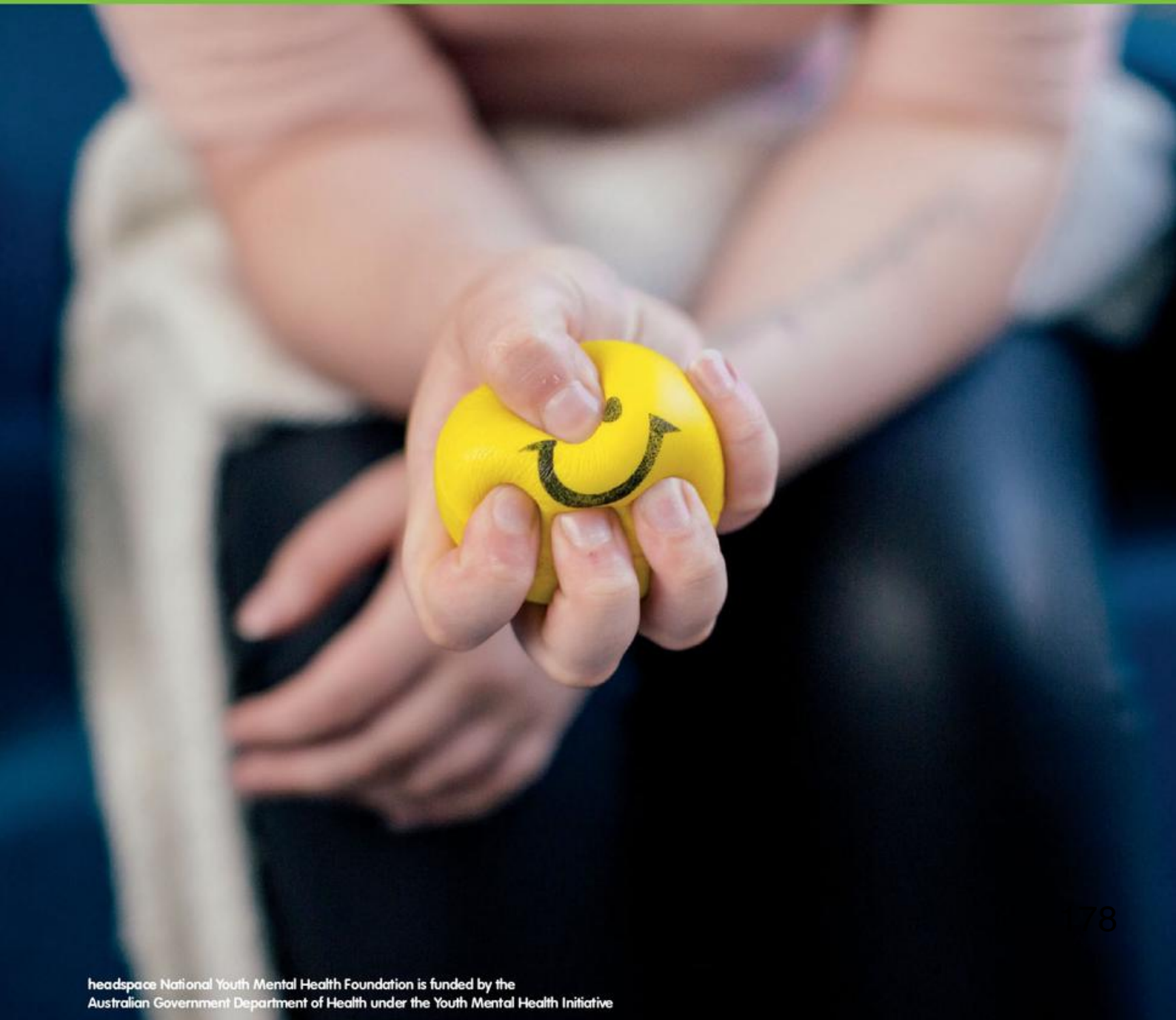
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MythBuster: Moving away from common myths to a better understanding of anger and anger-related difficulties in young people



MythBuster:

Moving away from common myths to a better understanding of anger and anger-related difficulties in young people

Who is this MythBuster for?

This MythBuster is written for young people and their families and friends. It may also be of interest to health and other professionals working with young people. The first section summarises key facts about anger and anger-related difficulties in young people. The second section explores what anger is, and when it becomes problematic, in more detail. Evidence that counters common myths about anger is then provided.

Common myths about anger

Anger is perhaps the most misunderstood of all feelings. When we think about anger, we are likely to be affected by common stereotypes about anger as an emotion, who gets angry, and how anger is expressed. There is often a misunderstanding that anger always results in obvious aggressive behaviour and so it is a “bad” emotion. There is an assumption that people who experience problematic anger are dangerous or that they are less deserving of help than people with other issues. Confusing anger with aggression can also lead to an assumption that it is always easy to tell when someone has anger problems. In fact, this is not the case. Myths about anger are harmful as they can make it harder for people to seek and receive helpful support for anger-related difficulties. It is important to challenge these myths because we know that problematic anger can be extremely destructive to a young person’s life. We also know that it can be effectively treated [1-4].

Getting support for anger-related difficulties

Anger is not a problem in itself. However, if you feel angry a lot of the time or have difficulty managing your anger it may be helpful to seek support from a healthcare professional. It is particularly important to seek support if your anger problems are causing problems in your relationships (e.g., with friends, family, colleagues or teachers), making it hard for you to keep up with your commitments (e.g., work or studies), resulting in other problems like feeling down, substance use or causing you distress. Another important reason to seek help is if you feel that you are at risk of hurting yourself or someone else as a result of your anger.

If you think anger may be a problem for you, you don’t need to figure out all of the answers before talking to someone about it. Even if you’re just a bit worried about your anger, or know that others close to you are concerned, it is a good idea to talk to someone. Seeking support from your GP or your nearest **headspace** centre is a good place to start. If you prefer to seek support online or over the phone, you can access support through ehespace.org.au. Getting support early could make a big difference to your wellbeing and your relationships.

Is anger a problem for young people?

Anger problems are a concern for many young people. Recent research with over 24,000 young people indicates that anger-related problems are one of the main presenting issues among young people attending **headspace** centres [5]. Only depression and anxiety ranked higher than anger. Younger males (aged 12-14 years) were particularly likely to present with anger problems. Anger is also a very common presenting problem in specialist mental health services and school counseling services [6-8]. However, internationally, research suggests that many people experiencing problematic anger do not seek support and when they do, anger and how to treat it is not well understood [9]. Several factors are likely to contribute to low rates of help-seeking and treatment. These include a lack of understanding about what problematic anger is, whom it affects, how it typically presents and unclear pathways to help.

What is anger?

Anger is an emotion that includes thinking, feeling and action components [10]. It can be experienced at different levels of intensity, ranging from mild irritation through to rage. The thinking component of anger relates to the thoughts and attitudes that affect how someone interprets their surroundings and things that are happening around them. These thoughts and attitudes influence what is interpreted as anger inducing [11]. Anger is usually associated with the belief or perception that somebody has done us wrong [12]. It is closely linked to the body’s “fight-flight-freeze” response. This response is very important to our survival because it prepares our body to react to a perceived threat. It can cause lots of physical changes in our bodies (e.g. raised heart rate, rapid breathing, hot flushes). This means that we experience anger in our bodies as well as in our thoughts and feelings. When we are feeling very angry, the way we think is also affected. It can be hard for us to think clearly as all of our attention is diverted to the perceived threat.

Understanding anger can help in learning how to manage our feelings and how to express them in a healthy way. In order to understand anger (in ourselves or in others) it is important to distinguish between the experience and expression of anger [10, 11, 13]. When someone experiences or ‘feels’ angry, they can express or ‘show’ this anger in different ways. Anger can be expressed outwardly through a person’s verbal or non-verbal behaviour. For example, someone may verbally express that they are feeling angry while speaking in a calm tone, and at a normal volume or they may shout, scream or use offensive language. Their anger may also be expressed in changes to their facial expression or through their actions. This may range from walking away from an interaction, throwing or hitting things, or physically attacking another person. Anger can also be suppressed or ‘bottled up’ (i.e., someone can feel very angry without showing their anger). When anger is ‘bottled up’ in this way, it may not be obvious to other people that someone is experiencing anger, even if it is intense or persistent.

MYTH: Anger is a 'bad' emotion

Anger is a healthy emotion that serves many adaptive functions. Both the expression and experience of anger are part of healthy emotional functioning. Of all emotions, young adolescents may particularly struggle to recognise and respond to anger [20]. Learning to be aware of our emotions and express them appropriately is very important to both healthy development and mental health [21]. Recognising and expressing anger can be healthy and helpful in developing assertiveness skills (so we can stand up for ourselves), our belief in own abilities and persistence [21]. By learning to express our anger in a healthy way, we are much more likely to get our needs met. We can also prove to ourselves that anger is an emotion that we are able to manage so we don't need to avoid it or think of it as 'bad'. Experiencing anger can motivate us to address perceived threats, or perceived injustices, by asserting or 'standing up for' ourselves, taking practical steps toward a solution, or defending ourselves or others. Far from being harmful, research suggests that developing these skills and characteristics may actually reduce our chances of experiencing anxiety and depression [21].

MYTH: It is easy to tell if somebody has anger problems

Some people who experience intense anger, or who feel angry frequently, suppress or 'bottle up' their anger. A person may do this consciously or sub-consciously (i.e., the person may not identify their feelings of anger or be aware that they are suppressing it). These people may be less likely to get help for their anger as it is not always apparent to those around them that they have difficulty managing their anger. Others may not realise that a young person's anger has become problematic and they are likely to need support to manage it. They may minimise or dismiss the young person's anger by saying or thinking things like 'boys will be boys', or 'he/she will grow out of it'.

MYTH: Problematic anger is the same as aggression

Problematic anger should not be confused with aggression. Anger is a feeling, whereas aggression is a behavioural response [12]. Aggressive behaviour is not always a sign that someone is feeling very angry, it can result from other strong emotions [10-12]. For example, if someone is feeling extremely anxious and overwhelmed, their behaviour may become aggressive in trying to escape their immediate environment [22]. Similarly, aggressive behaviour can occur in the absence of anger (e.g., if someone is trying to intimidate another person; 23). When anger is expressed outwardly, it can result in aggressive behaviour, but this is only one way that anger may

present. Anger can also be expressed through assertive action that is not aggressive. For example, when you are being asked to do something immediately, calmly and clearly telling the person that you will do what they are asking, but not until you are able to do it.

MYTH: Problematic anger is a 'male problem'

There are lots of different myths about gender and anger. For example, only men experience anger; when women are angry their anger is always appropriate to the situation; or that women's anger is less problematic or serious than men's [24]. These myths are closely tied to ideas about different social rules around emotional expression for boys and girls that exist in Western societies. Girls are encouraged to be more emotionally expressive than boys when it comes to most emotions (e.g., happiness, sadness, fear, guilt and shame) while boys are expected to display less of these "tender emotions" but more anger, contempt and disgust [21]. As a result, girls may learn to suppress their anger, while boys learn to express it.

The relationship between anger and gender is complex. It is likely to differ depending on factors such as a person's age and maturity, their social context (e.g., are they alone or with peers?), and the potential consequences of expressing anger appropriately (e.g., whether they will be rewarded in some way or punished; 21). When thinking about these gender differences, it is particularly important to distinguish between anger experience and anger expression (i.e., feeling versus expressing anger).

Generally, research doesn't support the idea that men experience more anger than women [25]. In fact, recent research suggests that if a gender difference exists, it is likely that women feel angry more often than men, and they may also experience more intense and enduring anger. In a large-scale study of the Australian population (aged 16-65 years), women reported experiencing more severe levels of anger than men [26]. This finding has been replicated in studies of adolescents [27, 28] and young adults [29] in a number of countries.

Overall, research suggests that men and women may express their anger in different ways. Direct aggression (i.e. physical and verbal aggression), and especially physical aggression, is more common among men than women at all ages [25, 30] and peaks in youth (aged 18-30 years; 25). This may lead to an assumption that women are more likely to express relational aggression (i.e., more subtle forms of aggression such as manipulation of relationships, spreading gossip, exclusion from group activities; 30). In fact, there are more similarities than differences in the way boys and girls use relational aggression in childhood and adolescence [30].

MYTH: Anger is less worthy of intervention than other emotional problems

People who experience persistent and/or intense anger, or who have difficulty regulating their expression of anger, can experience significant psychological distress. Their social functioning can also be severely impacted. In fact, research suggests that anger causes more destruction to people's relationships than any other emotion [10]. Most of the research exploring the negative outcomes associated with experiencing problematic anger has been conducted with adults. However, research with young people similarly indicates that individuals who experience problematic anger are at-risk of experiencing a wide range of negative outcomes in terms of their physical health, mental health and their social functioning [11].

People who experience problematic anger are at increased risk of engaging in a wide range of maladaptive behaviours

including self-harm [19, 31, 32], problematic gambling [33], substance abuse (e.g., 26), and aggressive behaviour [34]. They are also at increased risk of experiencing a number of mental health problems including mood and anxiety disorders [26, 35, 36]. Anger also has a significant positive association with suicidal thinking [37]. People who present with persistent anger, or who have difficulties expressing their anger in a healthy way, are also at increased risk of developing physical health problems, such as coronary heart disease and type II diabetes [38]. They are also likely to die younger than individuals without a history of anger problems [39]. Similarly, high levels of aggression (both direct and relational) are associated with a range of harmful outcomes [27, 30, 40].

What is problematic anger?

Anger may become problematic when it occurs frequently, at high intensity, and results in other problems [10]. These may include: aggressive behaviour, excessive risk-taking, self-harm, health problems, and high levels of stress and/or psychological distress. How much a person usually experiences anger and how intensely is considered to be a personality characteristic or 'trait'. The important thing about personality traits is that they are dimensional, so at one extreme a person is likely to feel angry a lot and/or very intensely, while at the other end of the spectrum, a person will rarely feel angry and/or experience only mild anger. Research shows that some people are much more likely to respond with anger to a range of situations, and to feel angry a lot of the time [10]. These people are described as having high trait anger [10].

In certain situations, it may be a more helpful response to suppress or 'bottle-up' (rather than express or 'show') anger. For example, a person who is feeling physically threatened may suppress their anger if they think that expressing it would make the situation worse and place them at increased risk of harm. However, when anger is suppressed frequently, or in situations where it is not helpful, this can be problematic in a number of ways. It can cause problems in relationships and reduce the chances of a person's needs being met. For example, a longitudinal study found frequent suppression of emotions predicted young people having less social support, feeling less close to others and less satisfied in their relationships than their peers in their first year of university [14]. Suppression of intense emotions can also result in other psychological problems such as depression or low self-esteem [15-17]. Suppression of anger can also be associated with unexplained physical health complaints [18] and can sometimes lead to a person turning anger 'inwards' against themselves. When this happens, intense anger can result in self-harm [19; see the headspace MythBuster 'Sorting fact from fiction on self-harm' for more information].

Is problematic anger a diagnosable problem?

Problematic anger is not a psychiatric diagnosis, however it is commonly part of a more complex clinical presentation [10, 41]. Anger can serve a function in regulating other feelings that are experienced as threatening or unacceptable by a person [42]. For example, if a person experiences sadness as a sign of weakness and vulnerability, strong feelings of sadness may be perceived as intolerable. As a result, when a person feels sad or anticipates feeling sad, this may trigger them to feel angry. Anger can also stem from other feelings that a person finds confusing or has trouble understanding. When anger functions in this way, it may 'mask' other negative emotions that are very distressing to the person. For example, mood disturbance in children and adolescents experiencing a depressive disorder may present as an irritable mood rather than sadness [43]. As a result, parents and teachers may describe depressed children and teenagers as "angry" rather than depressed or sad. It has been proposed that depressive symptoms in young men are more likely to be 'masked' by anger, aggressive behaviour, and difficulty identifying one's emotions (e.g., 44). However, recent research suggests that the relationship between depressive symptoms and anger is stronger among young women than young men [29]. This means that it is important to be aware that a young person experiencing anger problems may be struggling with depressive symptoms, regardless of their gender. For some young people, high levels of anger and/or difficulties managing anger may be associated with traumatic experiences (e.g., ongoing or past physical or sexual abuse).

Helpful resources

For more reliable information about anger including factsheets, videos, young people's stories of their experiences of anger, and how and where to get help check out headspace.org.au/get-info/anger/ and ReachOut.com. The Centre for Clinical Interventions (Western Australia) also provides a series of factsheets and self-help resources that may be helpful including 'What is Anger', 'Coping with Anger' and 'Assertive Communication' (http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/resources/infopax_doc.cfm?Mini_ID=49). The National Health Service in the UK has produced a more detailed self-help resource for anger problems called Moodjuice (<http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/anger.asp>) based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.

Clinicians can refer to the headspace Evidence Summary - Understanding and assessing anger-related difficulties in young people – a guide for clinicians on the headspace.org.au website for more information.

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sleep and young people

putting the myths to rest

Sleep is really important for health and wellbeing. This mythbuster explores some common myths around sleep, using research evidence. It also provides an overview of sleep difficulties experienced by young people. This resource is intended for young people, their families and friends, and health professionals.

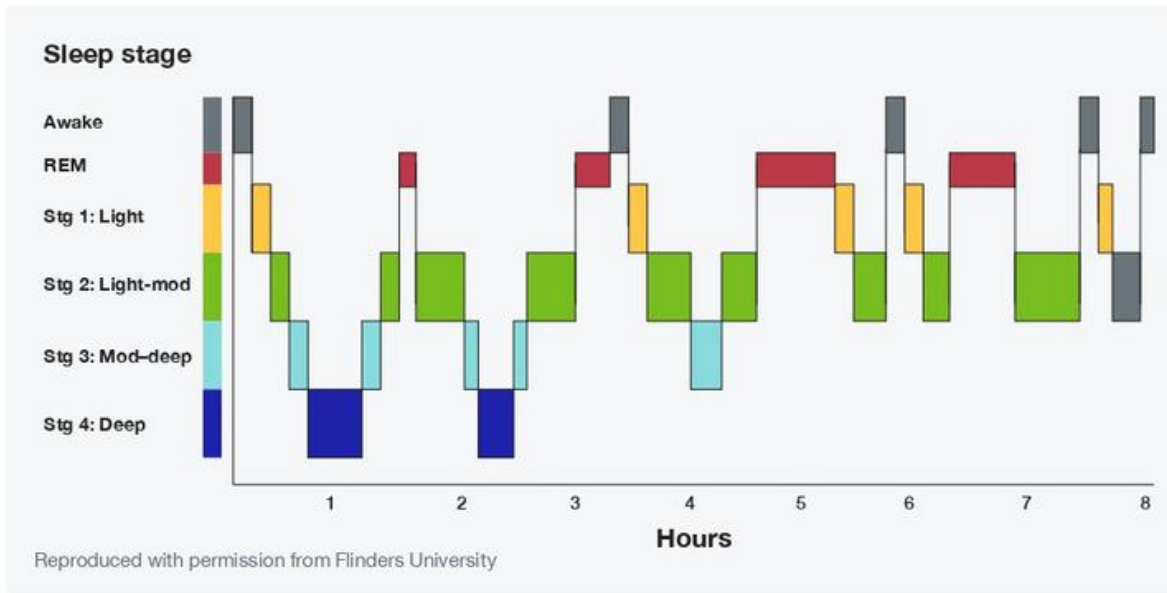
Why do we sleep?

We tend to think of sleep as a time when the mind and body shut down, but they are actually performing many vital tasks during sleep.

Two biological processes cause us to sleep: sleep pressure and our body clock (circadian rhythm). Sleep pressure is a biological response that makes us want to go to sleep. From the moment we wake up, sleep pressure begins to gradually increase the longer we are awake.¹

Our body clock is on roughly a 24-hour cycle. This cycle is coordinated by the pathways from our eyes to our brain that detect light and dark (i.e. day and night). In the evening, our bodies release the hormone melatonin, which prepares the body for sleep. We also experience a small drop in body temperature.² Both of these help to keep us asleep across the night. The way that sleep pressure and the body clock work together means that sleeping at night and being awake during the day promotes both optimal sleep and functioning.³

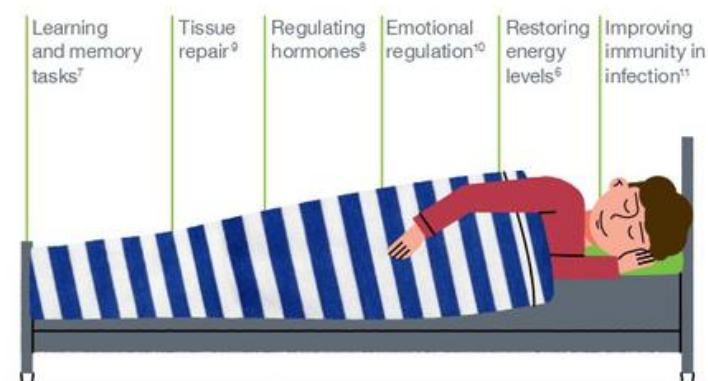




What happens when we sleep?

We cycle through two types of sleep each night: non-rapid eye movement (N-REM) and rapid eye movement (REM).⁴ The reason why our sleep is divided into these two separate types is not fully understood, but they appear to provide different functions.⁵ As seen in the chart, N-REM sleep has four 'deepening stages' of sleep from Stage 1–4.

In REM sleep, during which we are more likely to experience dreams, our brain is as active as when we are awake. The amount of REM sleep increases in the second half of the sleep period, so 7–9 hours of sleep (or more for teenagers aged 12–17) is ideally needed in order to have the right balance of REM and N-REM sleep.⁶



How much sleep do young people need?

The U.S. National Sleep Foundation has provided guidelines for the recommended amount of sleep.⁶

	Recommended	May be appropriate	Not recommended
School age children 6–13 years	9–11 hours	7–12 hours	Less than 7 hours More than 12 hours
Teenagers 14–17 years	8–10 hours	7–11 hours	Less than 7 hours More than 11 hours
Young adults 18–25 years	7–9 hours	6–11 hours	Less than 6 hours More than 11 hours

So how much sleep are young people actually getting?

A recent review found that teenagers (14–17 years) in Australia were sleeping 6.5–7.5 hours on school nights, with young adults (18–24 year olds) only getting the minimal requirements during the working week.¹² Conversely, young people are gaining more sleep when they have fewer early morning commitments, like on weekends.¹³

What's normal when it comes to sleep for young people?

Young people usually experience natural changes to their sleep patterns from their early adolescence. Some young people, however, can encounter more significant problems with sleep which then impact on their life. The next section explains how to tell the difference.

Young people need more sleep than adults.⁶ However, as part of normal biological changes that happen during puberty, young people (approx. ages 10–19) feel tired at a later time of night than they did before.¹⁴ This is because the sleepiness hormone – melatonin – is released at a later time and delays the body clock. It is therefore normal for young people to want to go to bed later and then sleep in later in the morning.

In addition, sleep may be affected by lifestyle factors or habits. These include using electronic devices at night, having more choice over bedtime or having caffeine or tobacco in the evening.¹⁵ A later bedtime, combined with the need to get up early for school or work, can result in some loss of sleep. This combination of a normal body clock delay, brain maturation,¹⁶ changing habits and early morning commitments, can alter a young person's sleep pattern.¹⁷

If you are experiencing these changes to your sleep, but they don't affect your daytime functioning or cause you distress, then it may not be too much of a problem. If you want to change your sleeping habits, then the tips in the section of this resource called 'Try these tips for a good night's sleep' may be a helpful first step.

... as part of normal biological changes that happen during puberty, young people feel tired at a later time of night than they did before.

What is not normal when it comes to sleep for young people? When is a good time to seek support?

If, on the other hand, you are struggling to stay awake and concentrate at school or work, and/or have noticed you are more irritable than usual, and/or you are experiencing distress about your sleep, then this could be a sign of more significant sleep difficulties. If these difficulties have been going on for longer than three months, they may meet the criteria for a 'sleep disorder'.

The two most commonly experienced sleep disorders among young people are insomnia and delayed sleep phase disorder (DSPD). Key symptoms of insomnia include regularly taking over 30 minutes to fall asleep, waking up during the night and/or waking up early in the morning and not being able to get back to sleep.¹⁸ A person experiencing insomnia would also be finding it somewhat hard to function when they are awake.

Key symptoms of DSPD include difficulty getting to sleep at a desired time, difficulty waking in the morning and excessive sleepiness during the day (especially in the morning). When a person with DSPD is free to sleep, they will commence sleep much later in the night (e.g. after midnight) and wake later in the morning. Therefore, it is usually not the quality



and duration of their sleep which is the issue, but the timing of it, as having to wake early (e.g. for school/work) does not align with their circadian rhythm. DSPD is more common for adolescents than people of other age groups.¹⁸

If you are experiencing these symptoms, it's a good idea to seek professional support. The positive news is that there are a number of effective treatments for sleep disorders – including behavioural interventions, talking therapy, sleep hygiene, relaxation techniques and bright light therapy.^{19, 20}

Contact your GP, headspace centre or another health professional in the first instance for advice about next steps and accessing sleep interventions. They might refer you to a sleep specialist.

Sleep and mental health

Research has found a significant relationship between sleep and mental health.^{20, 21} Sleep has been linked to mood, our ability to manage our emotions and moderate our behaviour, and anxiety.^{22–26} Disrupted sleep has generally been considered to be a symptom of mental health difficulties,²⁷ but recent evidence suggests that ongoing sleep deprivation can also lead to mental health difficulties such as depression and anxiety.^{28–30} Therefore when someone finds a way to improve their sleep, this can also have a positive impact on their emotional wellbeing.^{19, 29}

If you are struggling to stay awake and concentrate at school or work, have noticed you are more irritable than usual, and you are experiencing distress, then this could be a sign of more significant sleep difficulties.

myths

This section uses research evidence to test some common myths about sleep for young people:

Myth 1

“Young people are lazy”

During adolescence, it's common to go to bed later and then sleep later in the morning when you have the chance – like on weekends.³¹ Sometimes wanting to sleep later in the morning can be seen as ‘being lazy’ but, as discussed, young people generally need more sleep than adults and have a naturally later body clock.¹⁴ As you get older your sleep timing is likely to drift earlier again.

Myth 2

“Watching TV/looking at your phone/listening to music helps you fall asleep”

Many young people use screen media (i.e. phone, tablet, game console, laptop or TV) to help them fall asleep.³² But using some forms of screen media before bedtime is associated with difficulties falling asleep, sleeping less or having poorer quality sleep.^{15, 32} Interactive forms of screen media – like video gaming – interfere with sleep more than passive forms – such as watching TV.¹⁵ There are a growing number of smartphone apps which include relaxation tools. Whilst some young people find these helpful,³³ more research is still needed to explore their effectiveness.

Listening to mindfulness exercises, particularly the ‘body scan’, has been linked to falling asleep more quickly.³⁴ Reading books is associated with earlier bedtimes,³² while listening to music as a sleep aid is related to later bedtimes on weekdays and feeling more tired.³²

Electronic devices may interfere with sleep in a number of ways.³⁵ The most likely explanation is that the use of media delays bedtime by prolonging screen time that would otherwise be spent sleeping.³⁶ Light emitted by some screens contains blue short wavelength light. It has been proposed that this light can interfere with our sleepiness hormone, supposedly making us feel more alert and less prepared for sleep.³⁷ But there is no evidence to date that blue light from screens has a significant impact on sleep (either in delaying start of sleep or on quality).^{38, 39} Nevertheless, 30–60 minutes of low stimulation, screen-free activity before bed promotes the best opportunity for sleep, e.g. reading.⁴⁰

Interactive forms of screen media interfere with sleep more than passive forms.

Myth 3

“Napping is always a bad idea”

There is a belief that daytime napping automatically makes it harder to get to sleep at night. Certainly, napping can reduce the build-up of sleepiness that accumulates throughout the day. Therefore, if you already have ongoing difficulty getting to sleep at night, you should avoid napping.

But if you do not regularly have trouble falling asleep at night, then brief daytime napping may be useful. Research actually suggests that brief naps can improve performance and alertness, and reduce fatigue, following a night of disrupted sleep.^{41–43} This is the case even for young people who are not sleep deprived.⁴⁴

For naps to be helpful they need to be short and not too late in the day (i.e. no less than three hours before bedtime). Napping only up to 10–20 minutes is recommended,⁴⁵ as this prevents you falling into a deeper stage of sleep.⁴⁶ It's important to remember that while naps can be beneficial, they cannot fully replace the positive effect of a full night's sleep.

Myth 4

“Feeling tired is the only consequence of not getting enough sleep”

Growing evidence suggests that sleep plays a crucial role in healthy adolescent development.⁵ Therefore, not getting enough sleep affects us more widely than just feeling sleepy. Sleep plays a role in optimising our physical health.⁴⁷ It can also affect our concentration, memory and our ability to learn new information.^{48–50}

Furthermore, fatigue has been linked to increased likelihood of car accidents⁵¹ and workplace injuries.⁵² Reduced sleep duration can also predict increased likelihood of alcohol and other drug use⁵³ or vulnerability to mental health difficulties.^{29, 30} Getting enough good quality sleep therefore has a positive effect on our broader wellbeing along with our ability to function during our time awake.

... not getting enough sleep affects us more widely than just feeling sleepy.

Myth 5

“The cure for sleep problems is sleeping pills”

Sleeping tablets – which usually refer to benzodiazepines (e.g. temazepam) or Z drugs (e.g. zopiclone) – are not recommended as the first option in the treatment of sleep problems experienced by young people⁵⁴ and there is limited evidence for their effectiveness.⁵⁵ Research with adults has found that some drugs become less effective over time and that, once they have been stopped, the person's sleep problems can return.⁵⁶ There is also a risk of some sleeping tablets becoming addictive.⁵⁸ Another limitation is that they do not address the underlying cause of the sleep loss.¹⁷

Melatonin is not classed as a ‘sleeping tablet’, as it is a hormone that our body naturally produces. As melatonin is used to treat particular types of sleeping problems, such as DSPD, it may not benefit everyone with a sleep problem (i.e. those with insomnia). Since there is no evidence for the safety and effectiveness of melatonin in young people, it should not be used without consultation with a sleep specialist.

There is not enough evidence to say if natural and herbal sleeping aids (e.g. kava, passionflower, valerian) help young people with sleep problems.⁵⁷ Further, there is no guarantee that a ‘natural’ substance is safe^{57, 58} and there are concerns about some natural substances being harmful.^{57, 59}

The good news is that there are plenty of other things that you can try that research has linked to a good night's sleep. See the tips in the next section.



Helpful resources

See the resource on this page called ‘Assessing and responding to sleep problems in young people seeking help for mental health difficulties – A guide for clinicians’ – orygen.org.au/Education-Training/Resources-Training/Resources/Free/Evidence-Summaries

A report on the relationship between sleep and mental health – sleephealthfoundation.org.au/files/Sleep_and_Mental_Well_being/Sleep_and_mental_wellbeing_exploring_the_links_full_report.pdf

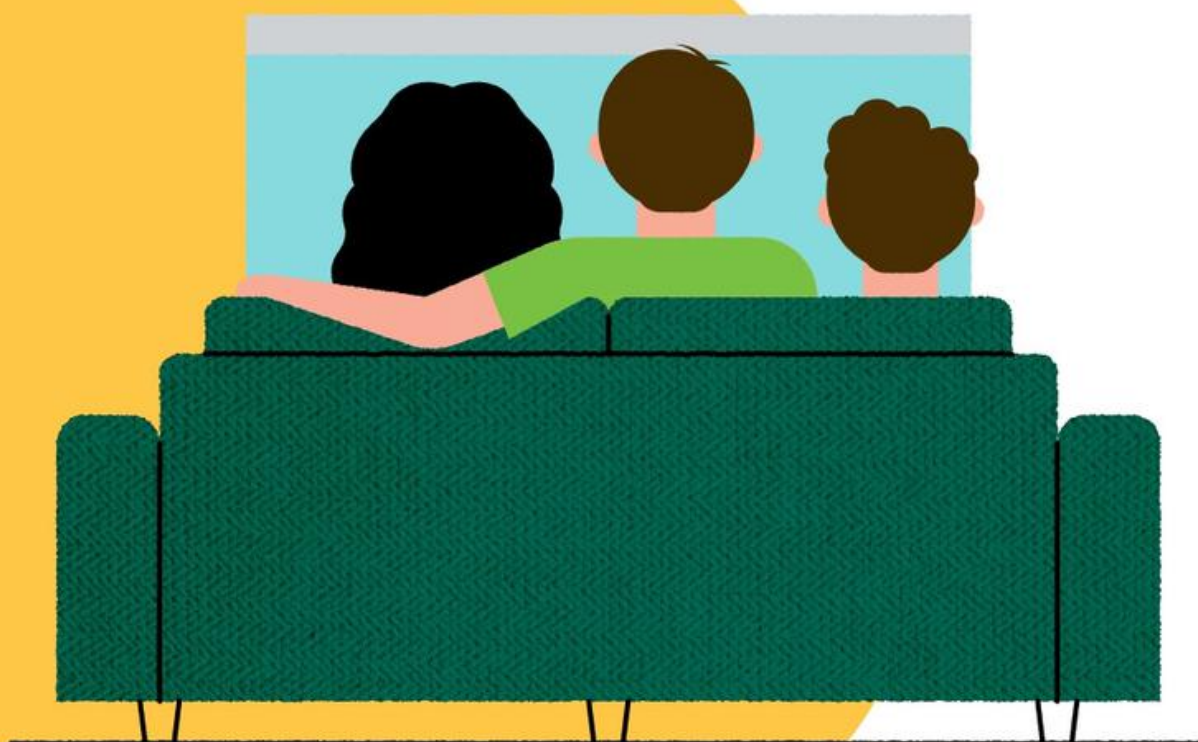
Fact sheets on a range of sleep issues – sleephealthfoundation.org.au/fact-sheets.html

Try these tips for a good night's sleep

- Try to stick to a sleep schedule which involves going to bed and waking up at a similar time every day, even on weekends.
- An hour before bed, try to limit your use of screens. If you do use screens, it can be better to do more passive activities, like watching TV, rather than interactive gaming and social media.¹⁵
- Try to create a night-time routine that will signal to your body that it's time to wind down – perhaps including a warm shower or bath, reading a book and then dimming the lights.
- It is better that your bedroom is associated with sleep rather than watching TV or studying, so try to move these other activities outside of the bedroom.
- Sunlight can help get your body clock on track, so seek natural light after you wake.
- Morning exercise could also help your body clock to shift earlier, but avoid exercise close to your usual bedtime.⁶⁰
- Keep light and noise to a minimum and maintain a room temperature of about 18–20 degrees for the optimum sleeping environment.
- If you are having trouble winding down, try some meditation, deep breathing or muscle relaxation. Mindfulness such as the ‘body scan’ exercise may also help you get to sleep.³⁴
- Try not to have any caffeine after 6pm.¹⁵ This includes coffee and energy drinks, and also some soft drinks, some sports supplements, black and green tea and chocolate.
- Try to avoid, or limit, your intake of alcohol or cigarettes before bed. While you might find it easier to get to sleep quickly after a few drinks, alcohol can actually make it harder to stay asleep and to get the quality sleep which helps us feel rested and able to function. Nicotine is also a stimulant and can cause smokers to sleep lightly.
- Try to keep naps to 10–20 minutes and avoid them after late afternoon. While they can help make up for lost sleep, if they are too long or late in the day they can make it hard to fall asleep at night.
- It's important to know that it might take a few weeks to notice a difference when trying out some of these tips – one or two nights is not enough time. If you've tried some of these suggestions and you're still having trouble sleeping, talk to your GP, headspace centre or another health professional.

What family and friends can do to help

- Appreciate that a young person's body clock works on slightly later timing than that of an adult and that they need more sleep overall. This means they may not feel ready for bed until a later time, and when given the opportunity, will want to sleep later into the morning. But if this pattern is causing problems for them and they seem distressed by it, then it may be time to seek help and support.
- Make sleep a priority. You might not be aware how much sleep your family member or friend is actually getting.⁶¹ Carer-set bedtimes do appear to support longer durations of sleep for young people aged 12–18.¹⁵ When sleep is prioritised in the family, this can have a positive impact on wellbeing,¹⁷ so it's a good idea to look after your own sleep needs, too.
- Keep calm about screen use. It is natural to be concerned about a young person's screen use before bed, especially with so much advice around its impact on sleep or wellbeing. But research suggests that avoiding arguments about devices may be more helpful for sleep than reducing media use.¹⁵
- Try to start a discussion around what is keeping the person awake. Worries can delay sleep⁶² – including worries about not sleeping enough and how this will affect the ability to get through the day.
- If your family member or friend has been experiencing excessive sleepiness, difficulties falling asleep and/or staying asleep, increased irritability, trouble concentrating and is expressing distress about their sleep difficulties,¹⁸ it is a good idea to encourage them to seek support. The first step would be getting in touch with a GP, headspace centre or other health professional. Effective interventions, are available.



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Disclaimer

This information is not medical advice. It is generic and does not take into account your personal circumstances, physical wellbeing, mental status or mental requirements. Do not use this information to treat or diagnose your own or another person's medical condition and never ignore medical advice or delay seeking it because of something in this information. Any medical questions should be referred to a qualified healthcare professional. If in doubt, please always seek medical advice.

antidepressants: frequently asked questions

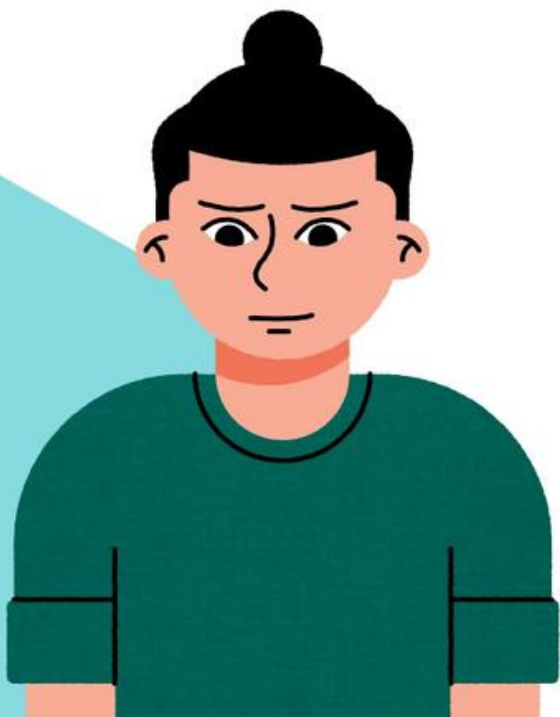
**for young people,
their family and friends**

Adolescence and early adulthood is a time when much of life changes: discovering new interests and learning new skills, becoming more independent and forming new relationships, finishing school and starting a job or going on to further study. It's an exciting time in our lives. However, it can also be a time when mental health problems begin – 75 per cent of mental illnesses emerge before the age of 24 years.¹

We don't yet fully understand what causes mental illness, however we do know that there isn't just one cause. People can experience mental illness due to a mix of reasons, including: genetics, social and environmental factors, trauma and stress, personality factors, and alcohol and other drug use.² Experiencing a mental illness can get in the way of some of the key life changes that happen during adolescence and early adulthood,³ that's why it's important to get the right help at the right time. Treatment can vary depending on the condition and how severe its symptoms are; antidepressant medication is just one approach.

It helps to think about mental health on a scale. At one end of the scale is feeling mentally healthy. In the middle of the scale is when you are experiencing a mental health concern – like feeling sad or worried – but this doesn't impact your everyday life or last a long time. On the other end of the scale is meeting the criteria for a diagnosed mental illness, which interferes with things like school, work and relationships. It can be worrying to hear that you or someone you care about is experiencing a mental illness. This resource uses the term 'mental illness' in order to emphasise that antidepressant medications should only be used to treat symptoms of a diagnosed mental illness. However, we acknowledge that you may not identify with this term – you might have your own preferred words, particularly if you're an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young person, or from a culturally and linguistically diverse background.

This resource is for young people aged 12–25 and their family and friends. It is designed to answer common questions about antidepressant medication and may also help during conversations with your healthcare professional so that you can make informed choices about your treatment.



What are antidepressants?

Antidepressants are a type of prescription medication used to help treat some mental illnesses. While there are a number of different types of antidepressants, this resource focuses on two: selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs) as they are most commonly prescribed to young people. Antidepressants change the levels of chemicals in the brain called neurotransmitters, which send messages between brain cells.

- SSRIs aim to increase the availability of a neurotransmitter called serotonin. Serotonin is thought to be involved in mood, emotions and sleep.⁴
- SNRIs affect norepinephrine levels as well as serotonin levels. Norepinephrine is linked to mood, alertness and energy.⁵

While the specific role of these chemicals in mental illnesses is still unclear, increasing the amount of serotonin and norepinephrine may support changes in the brain that help improve symptoms.

Who are antidepressants right for?

Antidepressants may be appropriate for:

- children, young people and adults who have been diagnosed with major depressive disorder (MDD),^{6,7} obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) or body dysmorphic disorder (BDD); and⁸
- people aged 18 years and over who have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)⁹ or some anxiety disorders (including generalised anxiety disorder, panic disorder and social anxiety disorder).^{10,11}

What are antidepressants used for?

Treatment options for mental illness vary depending on how severe the symptoms are.

Antidepressant medications are not recommended as the first option for treating depression or other mental illnesses in young people. When treating mild depression, being monitored by a health professional might be a better first step – which includes helping you better understand depression, advice on healthy lifestyle behaviours, plus follow-up sessions. It could also include some form of psychotherapy ('talking' therapy).⁶

Antidepressants are generally only considered when symptoms are moderate to severe or when psychotherapy alone hasn't helped (e.g. after four to six sessions).⁶ If antidepressant medication is considered appropriate, SSRIs are the only type recommended for adolescents aged 18 years or younger, and usually as the first type to try in people over 18.⁶⁻¹¹ SNRIs are usually only used when one or more SSRI treatments have not been effective.¹¹ Generally, antidepressants should not be used without psychotherapy.⁶ While other healthcare professionals may talk with you about treatment options, only a general practitioner (GP), psychiatrist or nurse practitioner is qualified to prescribe medication.

Involving family and friends

It is important to make decisions about your own care. It can also be beneficial to include family and friends, if you feel comfortable to do so. Family and friends may be able to provide health professionals with background information about your symptoms and help you get to appointments. When beginning a new treatment or medication, having someone else to support you can be helpful. They may notice any changes in your mood or behaviour, whether positive or negative, and help keep an eye on any side effects. Family and friends can also help you keep on track with taking medication. Health services should ask about including your family and friends in ways that you feel comfortable and that are likely to be beneficial to your wellbeing.

'It was very helpful to have someone else hear what the doctor was saying and to be able to discuss the options with them.'

– Young person

Adolescents aged under 18 years are able to consent to treatment and make decisions about their own care if the health professional believes they have the capacity to do so.¹² For more information see: reachout.com/articles/what-is-age-and-confidentiality.

Shared decision-making

Shared decision-making enables a health professional, you, and your family/friends to participate jointly in making a health decision, using both evidence and your needs, values and preferences.

Before discussing treatment options, you should have taken part in an interview (known as a mental health assessment) so that your health professional can understand you, your life experiences, coping strategies, your symptoms and how they are impacting your life. If relevant, they should tell you what diagnosis your symptoms meet the criteria for. This information can support you and the health professional to decide which treatment options are best for you. When talking about treatment for a mental illness, health professionals should explain different options (which may include not doing anything), what the treatments involve, the evidence for how well they will work, and their potential risks and benefits.¹³ They should encourage you and your family/friends to work through what your personal preferences and values are about the treatment options and their potential outcomes.¹³

If a health professional suggests antidepressant medication and you don't understand why or you don't feel like you have enough information, it is okay – and encouraged! – to ask questions.

After an appointment, you might feel ready to make a decision straight away, or you might need some time to go away and process the information. When talking with a health professional about potentially using antidepressants as part of treatment for a mental illness, the following questions are common ones to have so may be a useful starting point to help you and your family/friends decide if they are right for you.

More information about shared decision-making can be found in the 'resources' section at the end of this resource.

Frequently Asked Questions:

What other treatment options are available for young people diagnosed with depression or anxiety?

Antidepressants may help treat the symptoms of a mental illness, but they might not be the best option for you. They are generally only prescribed when symptoms are moderate to severe and/or when psychotherapy alone hasn't helped. Psychotherapy is usually the first type of treatment to try for a mental illness and even if medication is appropriate, it should be used together with psychotherapy.⁶

Psychotherapy aims to improve coping, communication and problem-solving skills. You can also learn how to recognise and reframe unhelpful thinking patterns and behaviours and how to better manage emotions. Other types of therapy might work on understanding yourself and others in relationships. It should be delivered by someone who is qualified and has appropriate skills in the type of therapy being offered.⁶ If you aren't already involved in therapy, the person who has prescribed the medication can refer you. Sometimes, psychotherapy is not available or appropriate before beginning antidepressant medication. It is important that you and your health professional have a plan to manage your mental health, especially if you are unable or choose not to engage with psychotherapy. Together you might also explore your barriers to therapy, and ways that these can be overcome.

There are also complementary and alternative therapies, including nutritional supplements. But here the research generally isn't of high quality and the results about whether or not they work for mental illness are mixed.¹⁴⁻¹⁸ The success of these approaches can vary according to a number of factors and some supplements can negatively interact with antidepressants. Therefore, it is best to ask your health professional if this is a suitable option for you.

Implementing any personal strategies or activities that you know are helpful for you – such as exercising, making art or meditating – is a great idea. Healthy lifestyle behaviours – such as regular exercise, a healthy diet, maintaining supportive social connections and getting a good night's sleep – alongside appropriate interventions, can be a helpful part of getting better.^{6, 19}

See headspace's 'Tips for a healthy headspace for more information: headspace.org.au/young-people/tips-for-a-healthy-headspace/.



Do antidepressants work for treating mental illness in adolescents aged 12–18?

Do antidepressants work for treating depression in adolescents?

Overall, among adolescents aged 12–18 years, research shows antidepressants provide either no benefit, or a small benefit for reducing the symptoms of moderate to severe depression.²⁰⁻²² This means that in these studies there was no improvement, or the improvement was not large enough for participants to notice a difference in their symptoms. For more information about evidence for antidepressants in treating depression in young people, see 'other resources'.

Do antidepressants work for treating anxiety in adolescents?

The existing research about treating anxiety disorders in young people aged 18 and under with antidepressants shows a small to medium benefit.²³⁻³⁵ This means that the people in some of these studies experienced a noticeable improvement in their anxiety symptoms. However, more research is needed, especially about how well these medications work for specific anxiety disorders (such as social anxiety disorder or generalised anxiety disorder).

Furthermore, medication is not included as a routine treatment option for anxiety in clinical guidelines for adolescents.^{11, 36} Therefore, the decision of whether to use antidepressants for anxiety will rely more on the health professional's experience and understanding of your individual circumstances, in addition to your preferences and values regarding the potential risks and benefits.

For treating OCD, SSRIs appear effective for decreasing the severity of symptoms.^{22, 28, 37}

Do antidepressants work for young adults aged 18–25?

Research on treating depression and other mental illnesses in young people aged between 18 and 25 is limited. Results are often generalised from studies that include older adults (e.g. aged between 18–65). Early adulthood is a unique developmental stage and applying the results from older people may not be appropriate. More research is needed in this age group.

Frequently Asked Questions:

What about the evidence for antidepressants combined with psychotherapy?

Due to mixed results, it is unclear from the research evidence which combination of treatments work best for adolescents and young adults with depression (i.e. antidepressant medication alone, psychotherapy alone, or both combined).³⁸⁻⁴²

For young people aged under 18 experiencing moderate to severe anxiety, antidepressants and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) work similarly well for treating symptoms. Combining them both is the most beneficial.^{23, 27, 43, 44}

For treating OCD in children and adolescents, psychotherapy – whether alone or with SSRI antidepressants – seems to work better than SSRIs by themselves.⁴⁵ More research is required about combined approaches.

Limitations of the research evidence and what it means

Studies about how well antidepressants work aren't perfect. Studies usually only last for between 8–12 weeks, so we don't know what happens to people after this time. They also often don't reflect people in the 'real world', as most studies don't include people with severe symptoms, people who report suicidal thoughts or behaviours and those who experience more than one mental illness.⁴⁶ We know that this isn't representative of many young people experiencing mental illness or accessing services.^{46, 47} Therefore, there isn't enough research to know whether antidepressants are helpful or safe for these young people. In this case, as part of shared decision-making, you and your health professional would talk about how similar or different you are to the people in these studies and base your decision on the best available evidence.



How long will it take for antidepressant medication to work, and how will I know if it is working? What should I do if it's not?

Not everyone will respond to medication in the same way. For people experiencing depression, antidepressants need to be taken for 2–4 weeks before they begin having an effect,⁴⁸ but it can take up to eight weeks to feel the full benefit (if any benefit is going to be experienced). They take a bit longer to start working for people experiencing anxiety.⁴⁹ They will work best when taken as prescribed, which includes taking the right number of tablets at roughly the same time every day. Once you start taking antidepressants, you should be having regular contact with your health professional to see how you are going. It can be a good idea to keep a daily mood chart to track how you're feeling, or ask family and friends to give feedback. If you do not notice any improvement after the expected time, you and your health professional may decide to increase the dosage, or try a different medication or type of treatment.

What side-effects do I need to look out for?

A health professional prescribing medication should explain any potential side-effects, as well as providing written information in a way that you can understand so that you can weigh up your decision about treatment.⁶ If you are not provided with this information, it's important to ask for it.

The most common side-effects of SSRIs can include headaches, trouble sleeping, nausea, diarrhoea or constipation, loss of appetite, sweating, feeling dizzy, dry mouth, feeling agitated, shaky or anxious.⁵⁰ Sexual problems as a side-effect are also common,⁵⁰ but are often mistaken as a symptom of the mental illness (such as a lack of desire or interest in sex). Some of these side-effects should improve over time, but others may persist.⁵¹

It can feel awkward to talk about some of the side-effects, but it is important to let your health professional know if you are experiencing them. Often side-effects happen early on before any potential benefits of the medication are noticed,⁴⁸ and this might make you want to stop taking it. However, it is not advised to stop taking the medication without first consulting a health professional. If you do decide to take antidepressants, you should have regular (i.e. weekly for the first four weeks) appointments initially to keep an eye on any side-effects and to monitor your progress.⁶ Some antidepressants have a higher chance of side-effects and suicidal thoughts than others,^{21, 49} so there might be one in particular that your health professional recommends. If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, let them know as this can also influence which medication is prescribed.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Do antidepressants increase the risk of suicide?

Research has shown an increased risk of thoughts about suicide and suicidal behaviour (we call it 'suicidality') in people under the age of 25 years taking antidepressants.^{20, 22, 37, 52-54}

In research studies, approximately four per cent of young people taking an SSRI or SNRI for depression experience suicidality. That is compared to 2–3 per cent who receive a placebo (a pill with no active ingredients).^{37, 20} The reasons are unclear, but one explanation may be that antidepressants cause increased anxiety or agitation and restlessness in some people.^{55, 56}

The possibility of suicidality emerging with antidepressant treatment is quite small, but serious enough that you should be closely monitored for the appearance of suicidal behaviour, self-harm or hostility (i.e. aggression, oppositional behaviour or anger). This is particularly important at the beginning of treatment or when changing the dosage. Your health professional should ask about your experience of these things before you start taking antidepressant medication, so that together you can keep track of any changes over time. Your health professional should check in regularly (e.g. at appointments or over the phone) to make sure you are improving and not getting worse or staying the same. They should be asking about your mood, any negative effects, and how you are getting on generally.

Discuss how frequently this should occur, and which healthcare professional should be responsible. If you notice any signs of these symptoms or your mental health seems to be getting worse, it is important to contact your prescribing health professional or member of your treating team immediately.

Can antidepressants affect other medications or substances?

As with any medication, antidepressants can interact (i.e. cause problems) with other types of drugs, including prescription medication, complementary or alternative supplements, and alcohol and other drugs. Talk with your health professional about any other medications or substances, even natural or herbal types, that you take as they could interact with antidepressants. Taking other substances in combination with antidepressants can cause them to impact upon each other (i.e. making the effects of each one stronger or weaker) or to have unexpected negative effects on your body.⁵⁷ This is especially the case if the other substance you are using affects serotonin levels.⁴⁹ If you are working with multiple health professionals, it's a good idea to keep them all in the loop with what medication you have been prescribed.

How long do I have to take antidepressant medication for and how do I safely stop taking it?

People are usually advised to take antidepressants for at least 6–12 months.^{6, 8, 10, 11} You should seek medical advice when considering how to stop taking medications, even if you are feeling better, as stopping antidepressants abruptly is not recommended. This is due to the chance of discontinuation/withdrawal effects (i.e. side-effects related to stopping like nausea, sleep problems, flu-like symptoms) or becoming unwell again.

The plan you make will usually involve reducing medication gradually and during a more relaxed time (such as school holidays) rather than when things are busy or stressful. This plan should include regular reviewing and monitoring to look out for any changes and any increased thoughts of self-harm or suicide. If you are concerned that you have been taking antidepressants for some time with no plan for review with a health professional, make an appointment.

There is no evidence that anyone should take antidepressants indefinitely or for the rest of their life. In general, there should be a plan for review at regular intervals.

Although stopping antidepressants can sometimes lead to withdrawal effects, these drugs are not considered 'addictive' in the same way that some other drugs are.⁵⁸ However, your brain does get used to the extra support if they have been helping, and so stopping suddenly without having psychological strategies in place may result in relapse of symptoms.

My health professional wants me to take antidepressants but I don't feel comfortable with this. What can I do?

When making decisions about treatment options, health professionals should consider the evidence for the effectiveness of an intervention, but also a person's values and preferences. This includes understanding and respecting cultural beliefs around mental health and medication. If you don't think antidepressants, or the type of antidepressant prescribed, are appropriate for your recovery, talk about your concerns and ask to discuss alternatives. Having all the information explained to you (including possible risks) is really important. If you don't feel you are getting the right type of care or don't feel heard, consider seeking a second opinion. You don't have to agree to medication if you don't want to, but it's important that you're able to make an informed decision based on the best possible evidence and advice.

For family and friends

The following frequently asked questions are for family and friends of young people who are seeking mental health support.

My young person has been prescribed antidepressants but doesn't want to take them. What should I do?

It can feel challenging and sometimes worrying as a caregiver to be concerned about a young person's mental health, and if they have been advised to take medication and don't wish to. Talk with them to understand why they might be worried or not want to take the medication. Try not to get frustrated, and to respect their decision. When a young person feels heard and understood it can help open up the conversation to talk about other potential treatments. Encourage your young person to talk to their health professional about their concerns, or seek permission to have this conversation alongside them or on their behalf.

Supporting someone experiencing a mental health problem can be challenging. Remember, professional support is available. For more advice and guidance on how you can best support your young person, visit the websites in the 'Resources' section or contact eheadspace and talk to a family and friends specialist.

I'm concerned about my young person being prescribed antidepressants. What can I do?

If you are a family or friend of a young person who has been prescribed antidepressants, you may be able to raise your concerns with both the health professional and your young person. Try to do so in a way that is still supportive of help-seeking. Having your own access to evidence and advice from a health professional is important so that you can understand the reason for the treatment choice and how best to support your young person. Health professionals will usually encourage a young person to involve their family or friends in decision-making around treatment. If your young person does not wish to include others, it can feel challenging to not be involved, but linking in with family workers or services could be helpful. Having a space for you to separately share your worries or concerns might be key to reducing any potential conflict or stress.

A note on stigma

Seeking support for a mental health problem, whether or not this includes medication, does not mean that you have 'failed' or that you 'haven't tried hard enough to fix yourself'. As a parent or carer, it doesn't mean that you have done something wrong either. Stigma around mental health issues can be a barrier that stops young people seeking help.⁵⁹ If you are struggling with your mental health, accessing appropriate treatment which is right for you can help you feel better. Getting help early is a great step in the right direction.

What does this all mean?

The decision about whether or not antidepressant medication will be included as part of treatment can be a difficult and confusing one. There is no one-size-fits-all approach. The decision about what is best for you includes consideration of the research evidence around risks and benefits, in conjunction with the clinical judgement of the health professional based on your individual circumstances, and importantly the values and preferences of you and your family and friends.

Other resources

- More information about shared decision making can be found headspace.org.au/assets/download-cards/sdm-evidence-summary.pdf.
- More information about the evidence for the efficacy of SSRIs and SNRIs for the treatment of depression in young people can be seen <https://headspace.org.au/assets/download-cards/SSRI-and-SNRI-antidepressants-in-the-treatment-of-depression.pdf>.

Resources for families and friends

- eheadspace ([eheadspace.org.au](https://headspace.org.au)) can provide specialist support to families/carers.
- headspace has a range of resources for families/friends (see headspace.org.au – friends and family resources).
- Families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may find the Victorian Transcultural Mental Health website helpful (vtmh.org.au). Some headspace factsheets are also available in different languages (accessible at headspace.org.au).
- The Carer Gateway (carergateway.gov.au) provides information about services and support available for carers.

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headspace is committed to embracing diversity and eliminating all forms of discrimination in the provision of health services. headspace welcomes all people irrespective of ethnicity, lifestyle choice, faith, sexual orientation and gender identity.



headspace centres and services operate across Australia, in metro, regional and rural areas, supporting young Australians and their families to be mentally healthy and engaged in their communities.

**For more details about headspace
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Disclaimer

This information is not medical advice. It is generic and does not take into account your personal circumstances, physical wellbeing, mental status or mental requirements. Do not use this information to treat or diagnose your own or another person's medical condition and never ignore medical advice or delay seeking it because of something in this information. Any medical questions should be referred to a qualified healthcare professional. If in doubt, please always seek medical advice.



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alcohol and other drug use in young people

for family and friends



Adolescence and young adulthood is an exciting time of change in all aspects of life: the body, thoughts, feelings and relationships with others.

Some of the brain changes that happen during adolescence lead young people to do things that feel good or exciting. At the same time, there are areas of the brain that are still developing. These areas have a role in being able to plan ahead, manage emotions and resist peer pressure.¹ This means that young people are more likely to try out new experiences and take risks than children or older adults, especially when they have strong feelings,² or when they are with friends.³

Taking risks is a normal part of growing up. It can be part of a young person forming their own identity, practicing making decisions, developing new skills, learning the consequences of their actions and becoming more independent.⁴ However risk-taking can sometimes get people into unsafe situations too.



About this resource

This resource is for family or friends of young people aged 12-25 years. It aims to:

- answer common questions about alcohol and other drugs (AOD)
- provide practical information about what you can do if you are worried about your young person using AOD, and
- give guidance on supporting a young person who is experiencing problems related to AOD.

For the purpose of this resource 'adolescents' refers to young people aged 12-17 and 'young adults' means those aged 18-25 years.

Alcohol and other drugs

Drugs, including alcohol, are substances that can quickly change how someone thinks, feels or behaves. Drugs can be legal (e.g., alcohol or tobacco), or illegal (e.g., cannabis or cocaine). Illicit drug use means:

- using illegal drugs
- using pharmaceuticals for non-medical purposes, like using prescription drugs without a prescription, or using them in an amount or for a reason for which they aren't intended to be used
- using certain substances inappropriately, such as sniffing petrol.⁵

Drugs are grouped by the types of effect they have on the brain. You can go to adf.org.au/drug-facts/#wheel to see the categories, their effects and examples.

Why do people use alcohol and other drugs?

People use alcohol and other drugs for many different reasons. The most common reasons people first decide to try AOD are curiosity, because friends or family offered it or were using it, or to do something exciting.⁵ Other reasons why people use AOD are:

- to relax
- for enjoyment or pleasure
- to be part of a group
- to avoid physical and/or psychological pain
- to rebel
- to cope with problems
- to feel more confident
- to manage aspects of living (i.e., to stay awake at work or for study)
- to relieve stress
- to relieve boredom.^{6,7}

The reasons for trying AOD may be different to the reasons someone continues to use.⁸



There are some things that make it more or less likely that a young person will try or use AOD, or develop problematic AOD use. They are known as risk and protective factors.⁹ For example, growing up around family who are heavy drinkers may be a risk factor, while being close to family might be a protective factor.¹⁰ Things like genetics, and factors related to family, community, school, friends and life experiences all play a role.^{9, 11-13} Usually it is multiple factors, and rarely a single factor that lead to problematic AOD use. Understanding and addressing the reasons why someone uses AOD can have an impact on making changes to their AOD use.¹⁴

How many young people use AOD?

It's not unusual for young people to experiment with alcohol and other drugs. Alcohol, cannabis and tobacco are the most commonly used substances among young people in Australia.⁵

Whether or not your young person has tried AOD, chances are they will have the opportunity to do so at some point.

AOD use among young people



1 in 3

adolescents have drunk alcohol in the past year.



1 in 2

young adults have tried an illicit drug at some stage.



1 in 8

adolescents have tried an illicit drug at some stage.



81%

of young adults have drunk alcohol in the past year.^{15, 16}

AOD use and mental health

A person is most likely to experience mental ill-health during adolescence and early adulthood than at other stages of their life.¹⁷ It is also the time when many people try AOD for the first time.^{18, 19} It is common for young people who have mental ill-health to also use AOD, and vice versa.²⁰⁻²² It can sometimes be difficult to tell the difference between changes in your young person because of mental ill-health or AOD use, or due to other factors like stress.

There are different ways in which AOD use and mental ill-health can be linked. AOD use can be a consequence of mental ill-health, for example a person may use AOD to 'self-medicate' or cope with the symptoms of mental ill-health.²³ Conversely, some mental health disorders may result in someone being more likely to experiment with AOD.²⁴

On the other hand, AOD use can also lead to, or worsen, mental ill-health, with the effects of AOD intoxication, withdrawal, or long-term use triggering changes in thoughts, feelings, actions and ultimately mental illness.²⁵ This does not necessarily mean that AOD use causes mental ill-health or vice versa, but each one can increase the likelihood of the other occurring, or one could make the symptoms of the other worse.

AOD use and mental ill-health may also co-occur because there may be common factors that increase the likelihood that they will occur.²⁶ For example, genetics and trauma play a role in the development of both AOD and mental health conditions.²⁷ It is important to recognise that substance use disorders are also a type of mental health disorder in their own right.

AOD use may make the symptoms of mental ill-health, like depression anxiety and psychosis worse by making it harder to manage work, relationships, health and safety.⁵ Mental ill-health can also make recovery from substance use disorders more complicated.²⁸⁻³⁰ If a young person is taking medication as part of treatment for a mental illness and is using AOD, they may impact upon each other (i.e., making the effects of the medication and/or the substance stronger or weaker) or have unexpected negative effects on the body.³¹ Some substance use disorders involve medication as part of their treatment. Therefore, it's important to talk about any AOD use with a health profession who is prescribing medication.



Considering that AOD usage and mental-ill health can be intertwined, if your young person is using AOD and is experiencing mental-ill health, it's best to find a service that can work with both, or two services that can work closely together.³² If this isn't happening it's worth you or your young person having a chat with someone involved in their care to find a way that they can work together with you all.

Negative consequences of alcohol and other drugs

Simply telling people that something is bad for them isn't an effective way to stop them from doing it.³³ Try to avoid telling your young person about the negative aspects of AOD use without having a two-way conversation with them. The conversation may be more helpful if it is focused on the 'why' of using AOD rather than educating on the negatives of AOD. However, when they are ready, this information could be part of talking with your young person about ways they can minimise their risk of harm if they do use AOD.

There is no 100% safe or 'risk-free' level of AOD use. Use of any substance always carries some risk. When it comes to alcohol, Australian guidelines recommend that to reduce the risk of injury and other harms to health, people under 18 years of age should not drink alcohol. For those aged 18 and over, it is recommended to consume no more than 10 standard drinks per week, and no more than four in one day.³⁴



AOD use poses both short-term and long-term risk of harm to young people. Some potential harms are related to drinking or using too much on one occasion, while others are related to regular use. About one third of 15-25-year-old Australians drink at 'risky' levels (e.g., more than four standard drinks on one occasion) on a monthly basis.³⁵

Short-term or immediate risks of AOD use in young people include:

- Heightened risk of experiencing an accident, injury, or death. For example, from alcohol poisoning, road traffic accidents, suicide and self harm, falls, and drowning.³⁶⁻³⁸
- Increased likelihood of risky sexual behaviour, such as unsafe sex (resulting in sexually transmitted infections or unintentional pregnancy)³⁹. Also increased risk of non-consensual sex, either as a victim or perpetrator.^{39, 40}
- Increased risk of experiencing violence such as being a victim of assault or getting into fights.³⁶

Longer-term risks are:

- Potential negative effects on the brain's structure and function. Adolescence is an important time for brain development, and it continues to develop into our mid-twenties. This means that young people's brains are particularly vulnerable to the effects of AOD.^{41, 42}
- Physical health problems including liver and cardiovascular disease, cancers, and obesity.³⁶
- Higher levels of use later in life and increased risk of AOD-related problems later in life, including developing a substance use disorder.^{43, 44} About half of the people who develop a SUD do so before the age of 20.¹⁷

For information about specific drugs and their short and long-term effects, see adf.org.au/drug-facts/#list

Signs that AOD use is problematic

The majority of people who use AOD will not experience problems relating to their use, but some people do.

Broadly, AOD use is considered to be a problem when a person has developed a substance use disorder (SUD), for example alcohol use disorder, opioid use disorder etc. A SUD is a mental illness diagnosed by a health professional. A person's AOD use needs to meet certain criteria for them to be diagnosed with a SUD. A SUD can be mild, moderate or severe. A person may have a SUD when:

- Their AOD use has frequent harmful effects on health and wellbeing. For example, using in situations that are physically risky, or continuing to use despite experiencing physical or mental health problems that are caused by the substance or made worse by it.
- They have less control over their AOD use than they would like. For example, using more of the substance/s or using over a longer time period than originally planned, not being able to cut down despite wanting or trying to, spending a lot of time getting the substance, using it and recovering from its effects.
- They experience cravings. These can happen at any time but particularly in situations where the substance was previously gotten or used.
- AOD interferes with important activities like school, work, hobbies and/or relationships with family and friends.
- They need to increase how much of the substance is used to get the same effects, or there is a reduced effect when the usual amount is used (known as 'tolerance'). The person may also develop 'withdrawal' symptoms, which means experiencing unpleasant physical or mental symptoms after using less of a substance or not having it.⁴⁵

The signs of problematic AOD use in your young person could be social, psychological or physical.

You might see:

- Changes in eating habits or weight
- Changes in sleeping patterns
- Sudden or frequent changes in mood or behaviour
- Fluctuating energy levels (hyperactive and agitated/fatigued and sullen)
- Slurred speech or being unsteady on their feet
- Changes in performance or attendance at school, work or other activities
- Loss of interest in hobbies
- Money problems or a need for money
- Changes in friendships, whether it be new friends or seeing friends less often.

Each of these signs could also be explained by something else such as stress, mental health problems or just normal changes as part of adolescence. If you are noticing changes in your young person, open and supportive communication is the most important way to find out what is happening for them.

How you can support your young person

Practical tips

There is no guaranteed way to prevent your young person from experimenting with AOD. People from any background use AOD or can experience problems relating to their use. However, family and friends can play an influential role when it comes to AOD use in their young person. There are also lots of things you can do that can help prevent harmful use and also to support a young person who is engaging in problematic use.⁴⁶

Role model responsible behaviour with AOD

Your opinions and behaviours towards alcohol and other drugs have an influence on your young person.⁴⁶ Demonstrate a healthy approach to AOD by doing things like:

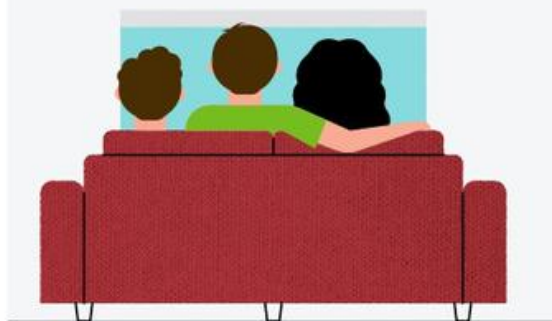
- drinking in moderation if you drink alcohol (i.e., following the Australian guidelines – nhmrc.gov.au/health-advice/alcohol/)
- showing that you can still socialise and have fun without always involving AOD
- modelling ways to relax or cope with stress that don't include AOD (e.g., meditation, exercise, talking to a friend, getting enough sleep and eating well). This includes being mindful of commonly used phrases that unintentionally role model that AOD is needed to cope in certain situations, such as "I need a drink"
- demonstrating ways in real life of saying no to AOD when you don't want to have any or you have had enough
- never driving or operating machinery while under the influence of AOD (e.g., drinking and driving)
- using medications as directed.^{47, 48}

Manage access to AOD

Avoid giving any alcohol to young people under the age of 18. Young people whose parents give them alcohol (whole drinks or a sip/taste) are more likely to start drinking at an earlier age, drink at risky levels later in life, and experience alcohol-related harms (e.g., getting sick from drinking, being in a fight, damaging property, getting in trouble with friends, parents, teachers or the police).^{46, 49} Providing alcohol can be seen by children and adolescents as 'approval' and contributes to family examples of drinking.^{50, 51} Similarly, make sure that prescription medications are stored securely, used only as directed and only by the person that they are prescribed for.

Stay connected

Having a good relationship with your young person is protective against drinking.^{46, 52} Building a good relationship involves doing activities together, whether it be hobbies, chores, watching TV or eating dinner together regularly. Encourage your young person to communicate with you about where they are, what they are doing and who they're with.⁴⁶ This is not the same as strict control or harsh discipline, which does not protect against AOD use.⁵³



Support opportunities for belonging

Having a sense of belonging or 'being part' of a school or community is protective against AOD use.^{11, 12} This means the young person having the opportunity to get involved in activities they enjoy at school or within the community, like sports or organised groups.

More information about different influences on young people's AOD use can be found at: adf.org.au/talking-about-drugs/parenting/influencers/

Starting a conversation about alcohol and other drugs

Some things are tricky to talk about, including AOD. It can be helpful to approach these conversations as a two-way street, where you listen, hear and validate your young person's experience. Creating an environment where your young person feels safe approaching you is a protective factor against AOD use.⁴⁶ If you haven't talked about AOD with your young person before, it's not too late to start.

Before you raise the issue of AOD with your young person, it can be helpful to get some support and advice specific to your circumstances to help you feel calm and prepared to talk about your concerns. See the 'resources for family and friends' section.

Get the facts

It can be helpful to have the right information about alcohol and other drugs. There is a lot of misinformation and opinions about AOD, but if you can focus on the facts the conversation will be more successful. You can find some reliable sources in the 'helpful resources' section.

Raising your concerns

Organise a time to talk in a private place where you both feel comfortable. Sitting directly across from your young person may feel confronting or too formal for some people. Sometimes it's easier to talk while doing something side-by-side, like sitting on the couch, walking the dog or driving in the car together. Ensure you have enough time. It's also best to have conversations when your young person is not affected by AOD (or experiencing comedown/withdrawal) or if they are tired or stressed.

Begin with general and open-ended questions about how things are going (i.e., questions that have an answer longer than 'yes' or 'no'). An example could be "I've noticed you don't seem like yourself lately and I'm worried. What's going on for you right now?"

If you do ask directly about using AOD, try not to make assumptions or accusations. Give specific examples about things you are concerned about without blaming, such as, "I've noticed you're missing school/work more often and I'm concerned about you, is there anything you want to talk about, or something I could do to support you?" It's also OK to be honest and say "I'm worried that you might be drinking too much but I could be wrong".

Be prepared that your young person may not have all the answers or be able to explain. They may not want to talk to you about it at all. This can be due to lots of different things; they might not know why they use or find it hard to put things into words. They could also be afraid of your response or of getting others into trouble.

When your young person isn't worried about their AOD use or doesn't want to seek help

It is common for young people to not be concerned about their AOD use, or to not want to stop or cut back.⁵⁴ This can be difficult for those around them. Young people and their family and friends are often not on the same page about whether or not AOD use is something to be concerned about. There is also a lot of stigma connected with substance use disorders.

People can be at different stages of readiness for any type of behaviour change.⁵⁵ If they aren't ready, trying to push your young person to seek help or convince them to change may not be a good idea. It could make them feel pressured and pull away, or be more secretive. It could also make them resist reducing or stopping their AOD use. However, it's also important to think about the individual circumstances of your young person if you have noticed problematic AOD use; for example, if they are a younger adolescent, their pattern of use is more severe or there are safety concerns related to AOD use (e.g., risk of overdose, driving under the influence, self-harm or suicide). It's OK to voice your concerns. If you're unsure of what to do, reach out to one of the resources for family and friends (see below), your GP or a mental health clinician if your young person is linked in with one.

Try to talk with your young person about how they would like things to be different and what they want for the future and to reflect on AOD use in this context. Having someone think about their own reasons for making changes and coming to the decision themselves is more likely to make them want to take the next step. Let your young person know you will be there when they are ready. The good news is that health professionals have different techniques for working with young people at different levels of readiness and with different goals for AOD use.



Try to stay calm and listen to your young person

It's important to try and stay calm when talking about difficult things, including AOD. If the conversation gets heated or turns into a lecture, your young person may get defensive or shut down and refuse to talk. Try to come from a place of curiosity rather than judgement and understand why your young person has used AOD and what function it serves for them. For example, all their social events may centre around AOD use and they might worry that they won't fit in and will lose friends if they reduce or stop AOD use. Give them a chance to speak. This doesn't mean you have to agree with their actions. Having their story heard can mean your young person knows you care about them and feels they can talk to you. If things get off track it might be a good idea to pause the conversation and come back to it another time. Even if things go well it can be a continuing conversation, not everything has to be said in one go.

Navigating talking about your own experiences

Your young person may ask you about your own past experiences with AOD. Evidence suggests that parents sharing information about their own use of alcohol and/or marijuana might come across as approval of AOD, and has been linked with higher levels of use and with more negative consequences of use in their young people.^{56, 57} On the other hand, being honest may build trust and closeness between you and your young person.⁵⁸ If you do choose to talk about it, keep it brief and factual. It's not necessarily about what you did or didn't do but it can be a way to talk about why you made the choices that you did and what the consequences were.

Let them know you're always here to help

It is OK to be clear that you don't agree with AOD use, while acknowledging that your young person may choose to do it anyway. This might mean talking about ways they can keep themselves safe – things like having a plan for getting home before they go out, only taking a set number of drinks to a party or telling someone what they are taking in case anything goes wrong. Go to hrvic.org.au for ways people can lower their risk of harm if they do choose to use AOD (called 'harm reduction').

Let your young person know that you love them and that they can call you anytime if they are in trouble and that you won't be angry – their safety is the most important thing. If this isn't an option then talk about who they could call if they needed help.

Set boundaries

Family and friends can worry that setting boundaries will make things worse, but there are ways to do so while maintaining your relationship with your young person. It's a good idea to get your own support to help you to do this. You might want to work on setting boundaries around things like using AOD in your home, who comes to the house, or ways to protect other young people living with you. You'll also need to consider the consequences of breaking the rules, and making sure that other important adults in the young person's life are on the same page. A good place to start is fcs.org.au/setting-boundaries.

Encourage help-seeking

Support your young person to reach out if they need to, even if they don't feel like they are able to talk to you.

Some more tips for talking to your young person about AOD use can be found at positivechoices.org.au/parents/starting-the-conversation-about-drug-use

Getting support for AOD use when you're worried

Learning that your young person has tried or uses AOD does not mean they have a substance use problem or need treatment. Many people can stop on their own, or with support from their family, friends or doctor. However, if you are worried that their AOD use is problematic, or your young person feels like their use is out of their control or they want to work on having a healthier relationship with AOD, it's a good idea to reach out early.

The first step is to contact your local headspace centre or headspace.org.au, General Practitioner (GP), or your state's alcohol and drug information service. Go to adf.org.au/resources/help-support-state or call 1300 85 85 84 to find out what is available locally and receive free and confidential advice. If your young person is already engaged in mental health care, speak to their mental clinician about your concerns with your young person's consent, or discuss with your young person speaking to their mental health worker.

There are specialist AOD treatment services that work to help people with problems related to AOD use. The goal is to support the person to reduce or stop AOD use, or to work with them to reduce harm to themselves, their family and the community when they do use AOD.

There are many different options available to support people to change their AOD use, including some specifically for young people. See adf.org.au/talking-about-drugs/seeking-help/ for more information. Many specialist AOD services do not need a doctor's referral.

Treating problematic AOD use is not as simple as just stopping. Completely stopping AOD use suddenly often isn't realistic or safe.

Confidentiality

You or your young person may want to reach out for help but be worried about the potential consequences, like school finding out or the police being informed. It is against the law for health services to share information without the client's permission, unless they are worried about someone's immediate safety. This should be explained in the first meeting with a health service.

Looking after yourself

Supporting a young person who experiences problems with AOD can be challenging. When travelling on a plane, in the event of an emergency passengers are advised to put on their own oxygen mask first so that they can assist a fellow passenger. Looking after yourself is an important part of being able to support others. For more information and ideas about self-care go to: headspace.org.au/friends-and-family/self-care-for-family-and-friends

There are services especially for family and friends of people who use AOD. More information is on the next page of this resource.

Sometimes people can use threatening, abusive or violent behaviour when under the influence of AOD, or as a way to get others to help them access AOD. This could be physical violence, property damage, verbal abuse, controlling behaviour or financial abuse. Violence is never OK. Contact 1800 RESPECT or 1800respect.org.au for confidential information and support. If someone is at immediate risk of harm to themselves or others, call 000.



Resources for family and friends

Family Drug Support: Australia-wide support for families and friends of people using drugs and alcohol, including a 24/7 telephone support line, support groups, education programs and counselling for families.
fds.org.au

Counselling Online: A free, confidential, 24/7 online text-based counselling service for people across Australia concerned about their drinking or drug use, or the use of a family member or friend.
counsellingonline.org.au

Family and Friend Support Program: a free online program designed for people supporting a loved one who uses alcohol and/or other drugs.
aod.ffsp.com.au

eheadspace: eheadspace provides free online and telephone support and counselling to young people 12 – 25 and their families and friends.
headspace.org.au/eheadspace

Helpful resources

Alcohol and Drug Foundation adf.org.au

Your Room yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au/Pages/home.aspx

Australian Government health.gov.au/health-topics/drugs
and health.gov.au/health-topics/alcohol

Culturally specific services

Australian Indigenous Health Infonet:
alcohol and other drugs knowledge centre
aodknowledgecentre.ecu.edu.au

Written resources in a number of languages other than English, select 'filter by > languages'
yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au/resources/publications/pages/publications.aspx

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headspace would like to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First People and Traditional Custodians. We value their cultures, identities, and continuing connection to country, waters, kin and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and are committed to making a positive contribution to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, by providing services that are welcoming, safe, culturally appropriate and inclusive.



headspace is committed to embracing diversity and eliminating all forms of discrimination in the provision of health services. headspace welcomes all people irrespective of ethnicity, lifestyle choice, faith, sexual orientation and gender identity.



headspace centres and services operate across Australia, in metro, regional and rural areas, supporting young Australians and their families to be mentally healthy and engaged in their communities.

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This information is not medical advice. It is generic and does not take into account your personal circumstances, physical wellbeing, mental status or mental requirements. Do not use this information to treat or diagnose your own or another person's medical condition and never ignore medical advice or delay seeking it because of something in this information. Any medical questions should be referred to a qualified healthcare professional. If in doubt, please always seek medical advice.



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