

FREE
PLEASE TAKE A COPY

Let's Talk *about*

MENTAL HEALTH

A guide to understanding and coping with common mental health issues



YSPI Youth
Suicide
Prevention
Ireland

Let's Talk *about*

MENTAL HEALTH

A guide to understanding and coping with common mental health issues

First Publication March 2022

Written by Dr Hannah Farnsworth

Published by Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland Publications Limited

Reprinted 2022, 2023. This document is copyrighted to the authors and licensed to Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland Publications Limited on an exclusive basis. The Four Steps to Help Programme is republished by kind permission of Alan McKelvie and Anthony Philpott. Four Steps to Help Programme Copyright © Alan McKelvie and Anthony Philpott 2010 – 2023. All rights reserved. E&OE. Written by Dr Hannah Farnsworth, a retired Medical Practitioner (GMC 7072713).

This publication may not be copied, reproduced or changed in any way without the express written consent of the publishers. You must obtain written permission before editing or changing this document. Selling without prior written consent is prohibited. In all cases this notice must remain intact. This work cannot be retailed or resold without the publisher's written consent. Published by Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland Publications Limited.

All information herein is provided as an information resource about suicide prevention and research activities only. It is not the intention of Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland Publications Limited to provide specific treatment or care advice. Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland Publications Limited does not provide certification or accreditation for any counselling organisation, individual practitioners or treatment or care models that users may find out about through our information or publications or other materials provided by or through us. Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland Publications Limited does not endorse or recommend any of the service providers, agencies or organisations listed on any leaflet or publication provided by us or any other organisation. In no event shall liability exist to any user (or any third party who obtains access to the information) under any law for any loss or damage (including but not limited to direct, indirect, economic and consequential damage) in respect of any matter whatsoever related to any information in any website or leaflet or publication nor for the use of the information nor for actions taken or not taken as a result of information contained in this or any other websites leaflets or publications (including, without limitation, loss or damage caused by negligence). The material contained in this leaflet is provided for general information purposes only and does not constitute care, treatment or other professional advice. Due to the general nature of the information provided in the leaflet, should you require specific help, you should seek the assistance of an appropriately trained professional person. While every care has been taken in the preparation of the information contained in this leaflet, due to the nature of the information and the processes of publication, the information may not be complete, correct or up to date. Information contained in this leaflet which has been provided by recognised third parties is provided in good faith and no liability shall exist for any errors or omissions contained.

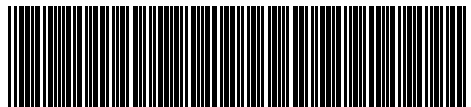


Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Warning Signs of a Mental Health Crisis	5
What is a Mental Health Crisis?	5
How Do I Recognise a Mental Health Crisis?	6
What are the Warning Signs of a Mental Health Crisis?	7
I have a friend who is showing some warning signs. What should I do?	8
I think my child might be having a mental health crisis. What should I do to help?	8
Are there any teen-specific warning signs?	9
What should I do in an emergency?	10
Coping with Anxiety	10
What is Anxiety?	10
How do I know if I'm Anxious?	11
How Can I Reduce my Anxiety?	12
How Can I Help my Friend Who is Having a Panic Attack?	14
Final Thoughts on Coping with Anxiety	15
Coping with Depression	15
What is Depression?	16
How Do I Recognise Depression?	17
What Can I Do to Cope with Depression?	18
I have a friend who might be depressed. What can I do to help them?	20
I think my child might be depressed, what are the signs?	21
What should I do if my child is depressed?	21
Coping with Stress	22
What is Stress?	22
How Do I Recognise Stress?	23
What Can I Do to Deal with Stress?	24
I have a friend who is stressed. What can I do to help them?	27
I think my child is stressed, what are the signs?	27
What should I do if my child is stressed?	28
Bullying and Cyber-Bullying: How to Recognise It and Deal with It	28
What is Bullying?	29
What is Cyber-Bullying?	29
How Do I Recognise Bullying?	30
What Can I Do to Deal with Bullying?	31
I have a friend who is being bullied. What can I do to help them?	32
I think my child is being bullied, what are the signs?	33
What should I do if my child is being bullied?	34
What is Active Listening, and How Can It Help?	34
What is Active Listening?	35
Who Can Be an Active Listener?	35
What Are the Benefits of Active Listening?	36
The Characteristics of Good Active Listening	36
How to Be a Good Active Listener	37
Is There Anything I Should Avoid When Listening to My Child?	39
Final Thoughts on Active Listening	40
Help and Assiatance	41
About the Charity	42

Introduction

Hello!

Most of us already know that it is important to look after our physical health, as this helps to prevent us from becoming ill or developing health problems later in life. What can be less obvious is the importance of taking care of our mental health.

Many adults will experience a period when their mental health takes a dip, but teenagers are also at risk of experiencing mental health difficulties. Feeling positive about yourself, having good levels of self-esteem, coping with life's ups and downs and being able to live life the way you want to are all important parts of your mental health.

Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland has provided free education and training services to schools and colleges in Ireland for many years. As a charity, we offer advice and support to young people with mental health concerns. We also work hard to raise awareness of mental health issues that affect adolescents.



In the last two years, the Covid-19 pandemic has greatly affected the mental health of many teenagers. Strict social isolation and restrictions, personal health anxiety, fear regarding the risk to vulnerable family members, and bereavements may all have left you feeling down or distressed.

Whether you or a friend are experiencing anxiety, depression, stress, or even think you are in crisis, there are steps you can take and places you can turn to for help. In this booklet, we will cover everything you need to know about the mental health conditions that commonly affect teenagers. We will also provide tips on what you can do to help yourself, and who to approach if you need help.

Our mental health can fluctuate from day to day, and there will be some periods when we feel happier than others. Occasionally, our mental health can become significantly worse. A mental health crisis can be a very scary experience that makes you feel like you have hit rock bottom. In this situation, understanding what is happening and knowing that you must request assistance from a mental health team or the emergency services is vital. Recognising the warning signs of a mental health crisis may mean that you can seek help as early as possible.

Warning Signs of a Mental Health Crisis

Periods of poor mental health can affect us all at one time or another. You may notice an episode of anxiety, a time of persistently low mood, or a reaction to a bereavement, traumatic event, or exam-related stress.

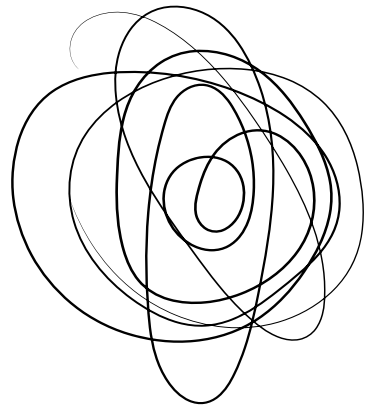
Although it is normal to have fluctuations in how happy you feel, sometimes an individual's mental health can reach a crisis point. This is the stage at which you might feel pushed to your limit or at breaking point. It may seem that there is simply too much for you to cope with.

If you think you might be heading for a crisis, or want to know what to do if this should happen in future, this article will tell you everything you need to know.

What is a Mental Health Crisis?

Many people live with mental health illnesses, such as depression or anxiety. However, there are times when worsening of your mental health can leave you in urgent need of professional help. If you feel that your mental health is at its worst, that you cannot cope, or that you are on the verge of emotional collapse, you could be experiencing a mental health crisis.

Whether your mental health seems to gradually worsen, or appears to become severe overnight, recognising the signs can help you realise when you need to get immediate help.



What Can Cause a Mental Health Crisis?

A mental health crisis can be caused by something traumatic, or occur despite there being no obvious trigger.

Sometimes there is an obvious cause for the crisis. This might include:

- Feeling stressed about school, exams, or work
- Worrying about money
- Stress from family relationship breakdowns including your parents getting divorced
- Having housing worries
- Suffering a bereavement (someone dying) or another loss
- Worries about your own, or someone else's, drug or alcohol addiction
- Going through a relationship break-up
- Being abused by a partner, friend, or family member
- Going through a traumatic event such as an assault.



If there is no obvious cause for a mental health crisis, this does not mean that you cannot be having one. If you feel that you are at breaking point but don't know why, your concerns are just as valid. Whether there is an obvious cause or not, you are entitled to professional help.

How Do I Recognise a Mental Health Crisis?

A mental health crisis might feel as if you have hit rock bottom. Life can feel extremely difficult, and you may feel that each day is a struggle.

- Feeling so anxious that it is impossible to leave the house or complete any of your usual daily activities
- Feeling extremely depressed
- Intense periods of crying
- Having panic attacks or flashbacks
- Self-harming behaviour, or the urge to hurt yourself
- Feeling suicidal
- Feeling 'high' (also known as feeling manic)



- Hearing voices that other people cannot hear, or seeing things that others cannot see
- Feeling paranoid about something despite there being no objective evidence of this (for example, feeling that people are turning against you when this is not the case).

If you experience a mental health crisis, specialist support is available. You must seek urgent help from your doctor, hospital, or crisis team to manage it.

What are the Warning Signs of a Mental Health Crisis?

Sometimes a mental health crisis can appear out of the blue, but at other times there are warning signs that a crisis may be about to occur. If you can recognise the signs of an impending crisis, being proactive in accessing help may help you to prevent the crisis from occurring.

The warning signs that you could be at risk of a mental health crisis include:

- Wanting to withdraw from, or avoid, your family or friends
- Severe mood swings
- Not getting enough sleep, or sleeping too much
- Feeling tired all the time
- Not being able to concentrate, even on things you would usually enjoy such as TV shows
- Not enjoying activities or hobbies you used to like
- Eating too little or too much
- Significant weight loss or weight gain
- Thinking about self-harm, or actually causing harm to yourself
- Thinking about suicide or death
- Using alcohol or drugs, or engaging in another form of self-destructive behaviour
- Giving away possessions you used to love
- No longer taking care of personal hygiene or basic appearance, such as not brushing your hair or getting dressed each day.



It can be reassuring to know the warning signs, so that you can reach out for help if they occur. You do not need to have all of these signs to request help; if you feel like you are in crisis, support is available.

I have a friend who is showing some warning signs. What should I do?

If a friend is showing warning signs of a mental health crisis, there are some strategies that may help them to feel calmer. Your friend may want to try:

- Relaxing exercises such as meditation, mindfulness or breathing exercises
- Writing about their feelings in a journal
- Completing a creative activity
- Listening to music
- Going for a walk
- Having a bath.



A friend who shows warning signs of a mental health crisis may feel able to talk to you about how they are feeling. They might also want to speak to a teacher at school. Alternatively, they may appreciate you finding out about counselling services at school, or talking therapies or medication they could access by visiting their doctor.

Managing Emergency Situations

If your friend is currently in crisis, you may need to request emergency assistance by calling 112 or 999. You can then request an ambulance, Gardaí, or both, depending on the situation.



Don't Try to Manage Alone

If you have a friend who is showing warning signs of a mental health crisis, it is important to remember that you do not have to manage it on your own. If you have concerns, you must speak to your parents, your friend's parents, a teacher, or call 112 or 999 in an emergency. Although your friend may ask you not to do this, in a mental health crisis they may not realise how unwell they are. Others need to act on their behalf to provide the help they need.

It can be scary to see a friend struggling, and you must make sure that you are also supported. Speak to friends, family, or your teachers if you need some help, too.

I think my child might be having a mental health crisis. What should I do to help?

If there is an immediate risk to your child's health or safety, you must either call 112 or 999 for emergency care. If they require urgent but not immediate care, you should take them to A&E or another emergency healthcare setting yourself.

For non-emergency, but urgent, care, speak to your family doctor. Alternatively, if your child is already under the care of a mental health crisis team, you should contact them straight away. If you remain unsure about who to contact, immediate support and advice is available by texting HELP to 50015.

Listening to your child when they are in crisis is important. Try to engage in active listening, without interrupting, so that they truly feel you are listening to them and are available to support them.

Are there any teen-specific warning signs?

There are some teen-specific warning signs that a mental health crisis might be imminent. The signs include:

- Talk of suicide – if a teen mentions suicide, it must be taken seriously. If they have access to medication or another means of suicide, you must stay with them and call for help. Do not leave them alone at this time.
- A fixation on death, which could include research on celebrity or other reported deaths, as well as drawing pictures, reading or writing about death.
- Feeling that there is no hope for the future, or that they will never achieve anything.
- Becoming withdrawn from their friends or family, school avoidance, or no longer attending extra-curricular clubs. They may stay in their bedroom or refuse to leave the house.
- Describing voices or experiences that other people can't hear or see – this could be a sign of psychosis.
- Becoming self-destructive. This might include excessive alcohol consumption, recreational drug use, reckless behaviour, or unsafe sex. They may appear to be out of control or 'spiralling' into unusual or worrying behaviours.
- Complaints about physical symptoms including stomach pains, headaches, or feeling generally unwell.
- A dangerous calm period, which may indicate that a child has made a decision about acting on thoughts of self-harm or suicide.



Responding to these warning signs may help to avoid a crisis from occurring. However, you should not feel guilty if, despite your efforts, a mental health crisis later occurs.

What should I do in an emergency?

In an emergency, do not leave your child alone but instead call 112 or 999 for urgent assistance.

If your child does not require immediate assistance, but the situation remains urgent due to the risk of a mental health crisis, specialist help is available. Consider getting a same-day appointment with a community doctor, get an emergency assessment at A&E, or contact your mental health crisis team for advice.

Caring for a child who is struggling with their mental health can be incredibly worrying and upsetting. If your child is unwell or in crisis, it is important that your own health and emotional wellbeing is taken care of. If you notice that you are becoming anxious, have low mood, or feel that you need some additional support, you may find it helpful to reach out to a counsellor or your own doctor.



Coping with Anxiety

It is common to feel anxious in your teenage years. In fact, anxiety is thought to affect up to 1 in 3 people before they reach the age of 18. Although it is a common condition, living with anxiety can start to spoil your enjoyment of everyday life, and even stop you from doing the things you used to love.

If you feel like anxiety is starting to rule your life, or you have noticed that a friend seems anxious, we have plenty of tips to help you get anxiety back under control.

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a type of fear, and it can feel a lot like stress. Common situations that might make you feel anxious include:

- Worrying about speaking in front of the class
- Falling out with your friends
- Feeling like you won't do very well in an exam at school.

But being anxious is not always a bad thing. Here we will use the example of feeling anxious before an exam to explain the difference.

Feeling anxious before an exam is normal, and it may even encourage you to get your revision done.

However, if you feel so anxious about the exam that you start to feel overwhelmed or unwell, then this level of worrying could be unhealthy. Some teenagers even find that they continue to feel worried or panicky after the exam has passed. In these situations, the anxiety is not serving a healthy or useful purpose, and can feel extremely unpleasant.

How do I know if I'm Anxious?

Anxiety can cause both physical and emotional symptoms, all of which can feel horrible. The list below may help you to recognise the characteristics of anxiety.

Physical Symptoms

- Feeling dizzy
- Feeling sick or getting butterflies in your stomach
- Headaches
- Feeling your heart racing or pounding
- Shallow or rapid breathing
- Shaking or noticing a tremor in your hands
- Aches or pains in your muscles or joints
- Being unable to get to sleep or waking up in the night feeling worried.



Emotional Symptoms

- Feeling stressed, nervous, or panicky
- Being grumpy, irritable, or lashing out at friends or family
- Feeling tired or exhausted
- Difficulty concentrating at school
- Constantly thinking about the situation or event you are nervous about
- A sense of dread, or feeling sure that something awful is going to happen
- Feeling like you can't cope.



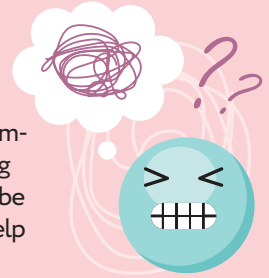
How Can I Reduce my Anxiety?

If you are experiencing some of the symptoms above, you may be going through a period of anxiety. The good news is that there are lots of simple ways you can start to feel better and manage stressful situations that may occur in future.

Recognise the Symptoms

The good news is that if you're reading this, you have probably already recognised some of the symptoms in yourself or a friend.

Whether you have noticed physical or emotional changes, or a combination of both, the symptoms may have tricked you into thinking that you have a physical illness. Realising that how you feel could be down to anxiety can be reassuring, and will help you to look for help in the right places.



Talk to Someone

Opening up to someone else can make things feel easier. Speaking to friends, siblings, a parent or another trusted adult may help put things in perspective. The person you talk to may be able to offer advice or tips that you hadn't thought of. Feeling supported can really help when you feel anxious.

If you don't want to talk to someone close to you, make an appointment with your doctor or find out if your school has a counsellor who you could talk to.

Write it Down

If you have stopped doing your hobbies, no longer want to hang out with your friends, or dread going to school, it may become clear that anxiety is reducing your enjoyment of life. Writing a journal or getting your thoughts down in your phone or on paper can help get things in perspective. Even writing a simple list of the things that are worrying you can help you to see where your anxiety may be arising from.

Writing or repeating affirmations has been proven to help your mental health. Try reading affirmations such as "I am trying my best" or "I can succeed." It sounds too good to be true, but if you keep repeating it, you will start to believe it.



Take a Social Media Break

Social media is great for keeping up with your friends, but using it too much can start to bring you down. Try to have a break from using your phone and social media, especially in the hour before you go to bed.



Stay Healthy

Keeping physically well will improve your mental health. Try to exercise each day, even if it's just a walk around your neighbourhood. Choose a healthy mix of foods, try to get enough sleep, and avoid caffeine, alcohol, and drugs.

Get Organised

If you leave studying until the last minute, you are bound to feel stressed. Rather than working through the night to get an assignment in on time, organise your time and start school projects earlier so that you don't end up putting additional pressure on yourself.



Practice Breathing Exercises

Breathing exercises can feel strange at first, but there are many apps and online videos that can guide you through this relaxing process. Before you discount it, try it once to see if it helps you feel less anxious.

Download a Mindfulness App

Mental health apps offer guided meditations to help you with mindfulness. They are often tailored to a specific need such as difficulty falling asleep or feeling panicky. Some are short, lasting just 2 or 3 minutes to help you quickly calm down, whereas others might take half an hour. Simply select the meditation that you think will best suit how you feel at the time.

How Can I Help my Friend Who is Having a Panic Attack?

A panic attack is an intense form of anxiety that might last for around ten minutes. Panic attacks create feelings of intense fear, shaking, difficulty breathing, and even chest pain. But watching a friend having a panic attack can be scary for you, too. Knowing how to help a friend who is having a panic attack can make the experience less stressful for you both.

Keep Calm

Even if you feel scared, try to keep calm. If your friend doesn't mind you talking to them, remind them that the panic attack won't last long, and that you will stay with them until it passes. Some people find it helpful to be reminded that they are safe, and that the panic attack can't hurt them. Others find it soothing to be reminded to breathe slowly.

Learn the Patterns

Most people get a warning sign of a panic attack, so ask your friend how they know that a panic attack is coming. They may feel breathless, have a pounding heart, become dizzy, or experience feelings of terror.

Learning their patterns or triggers may help you to realise what is happening sooner, meaning that you can begin to help them more quickly.

Ask What They Need

Your friend may find it hard to tell you what they need, but it is worth asking if there is anything you can do. If they respond in a rude manner, or don't respond at all, don't take it personally. If they want you to go away, give them space but don't leave them on their own. When an attack occurs in public, ask them if they would like to find somewhere more private. Afterwards, ask your friend what you could do in future to support them if they have another panic attack.



Validate Their Feelings

It is common to feel embarrassed by a panic attack. The panic response is out of proportion to the situation, but the reaction is not something your friend can control. Reminding them that they have nothing to be ashamed of, and that you are there to support them, can prevent their anxiety from rising further.

Final Thoughts on Coping with Anxiety

Anxiety is very common amongst teenagers, but it can have a significant impact on how much you are able to enjoy your life. Recognising the signs, trying new calming techniques, and asking for help are all wise ways of managing intense periods of anxiety, worrying or stress.

If you notice a prolonged period of time when you feel very sad, low or down, it could be that you are experiencing depression. Depression can make life feel hopeless, but there are lots of ways you can improve the way you feel. In our next article, we will look in detail at what depression is and how it might feel, as well as suggesting lots of ways you can start to manage your mood so that depression starts to ease.



Coping with Depression

Depression is a medical word used to describe low mood that last for more than a few weeks. Around the world, it is estimated that around 1 to 3% of those aged 10 to 19 will experience depression. New feelings of depression can seem to appear out of nowhere, and the rapid change in your mood can feel quite scary. When you feel down, you may not feel like going to school or seeing your friends. But when you stop socialising, it can make you feel even worse.

Luckily, there are lots of ways you can improve the symptoms of depression. If needed, professionals can also help you to understand and work through your feelings. In this article we will look in more detail about what depression is, and how to cope with it.



What is Depression?

If you have depression, feeling low or sad may be a familiar experience. Some people feel that their mood is heavy, dark or black. But depression causes a wide range of feelings in different people.

The Symptoms of Depression

Depression is not only a feeling of sadness. Some people with depression find that they are more tearful than usual, or feel angrier than normal. It can make it harder to fall asleep, or mean that you wake up in the middle of the night or early in the morning. At school or college you may struggle to concentrate.

Depression can also be associated with feelings of hopelessness or despair, or feelings that you are not good enough. It is no wonder that some people compare being depressed to living under a big black cloud.

What Causes Depression?

Depression can be related to your personality, as well as genetics or your family history. The rates of depression also increase as you get older or if you develop a physical illness.

Sometimes, depression has a clear cause. It might follow an accident, a traumatic event, the death of a relative, friend or pet, being bullied or falling out with your best friend. Often, it is not one event that leads to depression, but a series of 'triggers' or stressful events that occur over time.

Although depression might sometimes follow a stressful or upsetting event, in many cases, there is no clear cause for the illness. You do not need to have been through something that you view as stressful or upsetting to feel depressed. The condition can seem to occur out of the blue.

The symptoms of depression, regardless of whether there is a clear cause or not, have been linked to changes in the natural chemicals found within the brain. The altered levels of hormones such as dopamine, norepinephrine and serotonin can all affect the symptoms of depression that a person experiences.



It is common for those with depression to also suffer from anxiety. Anxiety is similar to fear, and it can reduce how confident you feel about going to school or socialising with friends. If you have both anxiety and depression, a vicious cycle of avoiding social situations, becoming isolated, and then feeling that your mood is even lower, can occur. It is important to get help in breaking this cycle, so that you can start to find enjoyment in life again.

How Do I Recognise Depression?

Both adults, teenagers and children can experience depression. The most well-known symptoms of depression include:

- Feeling sad or having a low mood that won't go away
- Feeling irritable or grumpy, often for no reason
- Not wanting to do any of the things you used to enjoy, such as clubs, activities, seeing friends, gaming or reading
- Feeling tired or exhausted no matter how much sleep you get.

Some teenagers might have additional symptoms of depression including:

- Not being able to concentrate on activities including school work, TV programmes or conversations
- Finding it hard to make decisions
- Not being able to relax, or the opposite, feeling that you have no energy to do anything
- Having trouble sleeping, or sleeping more than usual
- Not wanting to spend time with friends or family
- Eating more or less than usual
- Gaining or losing weight
- Feeling guilty
- Feeling that you are worthless
- Thoughts that there is nothing good in your life
- Feeling numb or as if you don't have any emotions any more
- Having thoughts about hurting yourself, or about suicide.



Sometimes, depression can cause physical symptoms such as headaches or stomach aches, too.

If anxiety occurs with depression, it may make you feel nervous, stressed or panicky. You may have a sense of dread, or physical symptoms such as dizziness, feeling sick or shaky. The symptoms that occur with depression can make some teenagers think about trying alcohol or drugs to try to cope with how they feel.

What Can I Do to Cope with Depression?



It can feel like depression is taking over your life. Many teenagers with depression feel like they are alone, but there are places that you can turn to get help with how you are feeling.

Keep Talking

Although you might feel like pulling away from your friends and family, socialising can help you to feel better. Keep in touch with your friends, even if just by text, and try to spend time with family or friends. Something as simple as watching TV with a sibling in the evening can be helpful.

Talk to a friend, sibling, parent, or another trusted adult (like a teacher or sports coach) about how you are feeling. Depression is common and is now better understood than it used to be. Sharing your worries, concerns or feelings with someone else can help to lift some of the heaviness you might be feeling. If it feels too difficult to talk out loud or in person, send a text, email or letter explaining how you feel.

Once you have shared your worries with someone else, you may benefit from their support in starting to manage and improve how you feel.

Stay Active

You might not feel like it, but becoming active can really help your mood. Even if you have never felt sporty, it's not too late to start. Even people who are retired and have never been active can take up a new form of exercise!

If you've always hated PE and the thought of exercise, do something as simple as going for a five minute walk after school. Phone a friend while you're out, or pay attention to the sights and sounds around you. Research has shown that getting outside can help your mental health. If the walk helps, build on this in the next few days or weeks by going for a short scooter, cycle, jog, or a swim in the local pool.

Maintain Your Routine

It can be tempting to withdraw from your usual activities when your mood is low. But by carrying on with school, clubs and social events, you can keep up with your hobbies, schoolwork and friendships. These activities are not only a good distraction, but they can also help to improve the way you feel overall.

When you feel down, it can make it harder to keep a healthy sleep pattern. Try to keep to your normal bedtime and wake up time, as becoming tired or losing your sleep routine can make you feel worse.

Eat Well

Depression can lead you to eat more or less than usual, and this can cause weight gain or loss. Eating three healthy or balanced meals each day will help to keep your weight steady, as well as giving you the right amount of energy to focus on schoolwork and other activities.

Start a Journal

Keeping a journal is a good way to express your feelings and start to work through them. If you don't feel like writing much, jot down a few bullet points each day about how you are feeling. If you're feeling creative, draw a picture to express yourself instead.

Seek Professional Help

Sometimes, despite trying all of the above, a low mood can remain. Some people may feel so low that they don't feel able to try any of the tips above. In either case, it is very important that you seek help from an expert.

There are several professionals who can listen to how you are feeling and offer advice. You could book an appointment with your GP, or find out if your school has a counsellor who you can see. If neither of these options appeal, phone helplines exist including Childline, Pieta House and The Samaritans.



Consider Medications or Therapies

If you seek professional help, you may be offered anti-depressants, counselling or cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) to help treat the symptoms of depression. Although in the past anti-depressants were sometimes viewed negatively, many people who need them find them to be a helpful way to lift the symptoms of depression.

Know How to Manage an Emergency

Depression can sometimes make you feel so low that you think about hurting yourself or even have thoughts about suicide. If this occurs, or if you have already caused harm to yourself, you must request urgent medical assistance.

If you require urgent or immediate care, or are concerned for your safety (or the safety of someone else), you must visit your GP, hospital or out of hours clinic straight away. In an emergency, call 999 to request an ambulance or Gardaí.

I have a friend who might be depressed. What can I do to help them?

If reading the symptoms of depression makes you wonder if your friend might be depressed, it is reassuring to know that there are plenty of ways that you can help them. Depression is experienced differently by each person, but your friend may find it helpful if you:

- Start a conversation about how they are feeling. They may not feel confident enough to begin talking, but if you ask the question, it can make it easier for them to open up. You could start with:
 - “You’ve seemed a bit down lately. Is there anything that you want to talk about?”
 - “It seems like you’ve been having a hard time, can I help with anything?”
- Offer to help them find support, such as a friendly teacher, a counsellor, or help them to book a GP appointment.
- Encourage them to keep socialising, to carry on with any therapy, or to keep taking any medicines that a doctor prescribes.
- Learn about depression in books or online. The more you understand about it, the more effectively you will be able to understand and support your friend.



It is important that you look after your own health as well. It is not your job to fix or mend your friend, and you are not alone. It can be hard to support a friend with depression, so make sure you reach out to other friends or your parents if it starts to feel too much.

- Keep inviting them to events. Even if your friend has started to withdraw from social events, one day they may feel up to joining you again, and this will help to prevent isolation.
- Remain patient – it will take time for depression to start to improve.
- Text or call every now and again to check how they are. This shows them that you care, and may stop them from feeling so alone.

I think my child might be depressed, what are the signs?

Sometimes it is clear that your child has low mood or depression. In other cases, it might be difficult to work out if the symptoms can be attributed to 'normal' teenage behaviour or the start of depression.

Occasional bad moods and irritability are normal during the teenage years, but depression can cause overwhelming sadness, anger or withdrawal from friends and family. Even the activities that they used to love may no longer appeal, and it may seem that their personality has been stripped away.

If you notice persistent sadness, negativity, tearfulness, anger, irritability or hopelessness, depression could be the cause.

What should I do if my child is depressed?

Ignoring depression in the hope that it may resolve on its own is unlikely to be helpful. If you suspect that your child is depressed, take steps to help and support them straight away. Even if depression isn't the cause, the behavioural signs that you have noticed may need addressing anyway.

Open up a conversation with your teenager in a non-judgmental and loving way. Mention the symptoms that are concerning you, and see if your child can explain how they are feeling. Listen, without interrupting, to what they tell you. Ensure that your child knows that they have your support no matter what they say.

If they refuse to talk, don't give up. Instead, emphasise your concern in a gentle manner and reopen the conversation again in a few days. If they won't talk, trust your instinct, and speak to a professional about your concerns. This might involve making an appointment with their teacher, or taking advice from a counsellor or GP.



Continue to encourage attendance at school and social activities, as well as spending time with friends so that isolation is avoided. Support your child in exercising, eating healthily and getting enough sleep, too.

Supporting a child with depression can be a worrying time. Be sure to make time for self-care and seek your own support if needed.

If you have serious concerns about the health of your child, seek medical advice straight away.

A lot is expected of teenagers, and two years on from the start of the pandemic, this has never been truer. Many teens feel over-burdened or stressed by school, caring responsibilities, relationships or worries about the future. In this article, we will help you to recognise the ways that stress can present itself, as well as some effective ways to combat feeling mentally drained or overwhelmed.

Coping with Stress

Stress is a normal part of life. It can affect people of all ages, including teenagers, and often it won't last for long. However, sometimes stress can last for a long time, and in this case it may start to affect how well you feel physically and mentally.

Luckily, there are plenty of strategies that can help you to both cope with the symptoms of stress, and manage it so that you feel less stressed.



What is Stress?

Stress is a natural response to certain scenarios. In some cases, stress can give you some motivation to get on with a task, such as revising for an exam or doing more training before a sports' event. This short-term stress can be positive as it drives you to do the best you can.

However, sometimes you might feel disproportionately stressed about something that shouldn't cause you too much stress, such as speaking in front of an audience. Public speaking can be nerve-wracking, and if it doesn't go well you may feel frustrated or embarrassed. However, objectively nothing terrible will happen when you give a speech. Everyday events shouldn't cause you to feel so stressed that your mental health starts to suffer.

If stress lasts for a long time, or you feel stressed about small things, this emotion is no longer healthy. People who have chronic or severe stress may start to notice worrying physical or emotional symptoms, and so it is important to manage this.

How Do I Recognise Stress?

Everyone experiences stress differently, but it commonly makes you feel like you are under pressure, anxious, overwhelmed or exhausted.

There are many causes of stress. If you are going through any of the following, then it is natural that you might be feeling stressed or anxious.

- Problems at home such as your parents separating, or difficulties with your siblings
- Increased pressure to perform well at school, college, university, or in your job
- Worrying about money, or living in poverty due to financial difficulties
- Being bullied at school
- Having friendship problems or finding it hard to fit in socially
- Moving to a new school
- Having a physical illness
- Feeling under pressure from friends to try alcohol, use drugs, date or have sex.

Stress can be caused by a very wide range of events or situations. If you feel stressed but none of the above factors are relevant, this does not mean that it can't be stress related. Some people are more susceptible to stress, so an event that wouldn't worry one person can cause an extreme stress response in another.



Mental Symptoms of Stress

The most common mental symptoms of stress include:

- Excessive or frequent worrying
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling indecisive or unable to make a decision
- Being more irritable than usual
- Being more forgetful.



Physical Symptoms of Stress

When you are stressed, you may notice physical symptoms including:

- Headaches
- Feeling dizzy
- Noticing that your muscles feel tense or tight
- Feeling your heart racing or beating faster than usual
- Getting stomach aches or feeling sick
- Your GP may tell you that your blood pressure is higher than usual.



Behavioural Symptoms of Stress

Stress can cause you to behave in a way that is out of character for you. You may notice if you or a friend:

- Start withdrawing from social activities such as clubs or parties
- Neglect responsibilities including chores or personal hygiene
- Are more bad tempered than usual, including being snappy, angry or aggressive
- Sleep more or less than usual
- Eat more or less than usual.

What Can I Do to Deal with Stress?

It is important not only to take steps to deal with stress when it occurs, but also to take preventative action to help you reduce the impact of future high-stress situations. If you can learn to manage stress, you can avoid becoming overwhelmed and build your resilience levels.

Prioritise Getting Enough Sleep

In your teenage years, you need 8 to 10 hours of sleep each night. Not getting enough sleep can leave you feeling irritable and make it more difficult to concentrate. Being tired can also make it far harder to deal with stressful situations.

Furthermore, if you are struggling to concentrate at school because you are tired, you may start to fall behind, and this can make you feel even more stressed!

To get enough sleep, avoid looking at your phone before bed, as this can disrupt natural feelings of sleepiness. Make sure that your bedroom feels like a comfortable, safe space. Set a reasonable bedtime and try to wake up around the same time each day to get into a good sleep routine.

Be Social Media Aware

It can be very difficult to disconnect from tech and digital devices. Try to be aware of the amount of time you spend on your phone. If you are responding to texts while doing your homework, this distraction can consume a significant amount of time and make it feel like your schoolwork is taking forever. Put your phone to one side when working, so that you can get tasks done efficiently.

To avoid becoming overwhelmed by social media, switch your phone off at night. If you have concerns about cyberbullying, harmful content or internet trolls, limit exposure and speak to a responsible adult if you need help.

Keep Active

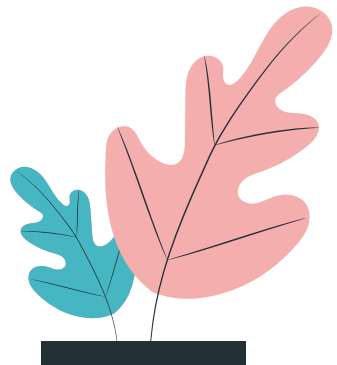
Physical activity is a great way to reduce stress. Exercise improves your physical health, boosts your mood, increases energy levels and promotes better sleep. Exercise also stimulates the release of endorphins which make you feel good afterwards. You don't have to be a marathon runner; a brisk walk round the block, a bike ride or an online dance or yoga session are great, too. Doing two to three hours of exercise each week will really help you to start feeling better.

Talk to Someone

When you feel stressed, you might become withdrawn and start to feel isolated. However, sharing how you feel can help to lift the burden from your shoulders. Choose someone you trust, such as a close friend, a parent, teacher, health professional or a support organisation. Consider counselling if stress is starting to affect your quality of life.

Practice Breathing Exercises

Breathing exercises can offer immediate relief from acute stress. A simple exercise is to breathe in through your nose gently and slowly, and exhale through your mouth. Focus on repeating this slow, continual cycle for 3 to 5 minutes. You do not have to hold your breath, as this can feel especially difficult when you are stressed. These exercises can help you to feel calmer, and better able to deal with stressful situations.



Spend Time Outside

Getting outside is a proven stress-buster. A walk to the park, a stroll through the woods, a trip to the beach, or even just sitting in the garden can expose you to fresh air, sunshine or even rain. Being outside in nature has also been proven to lower blood pressure, which can become raised when you are stressed.

Try Meditating or Mindfulness

Regular meditation or mindfulness are great ways to reduce stress, improve your mood and help you focus. There are many apps that offer guided meditation or mindfulness sessions, so that you can sit quietly and listen while someone guides you through a gentle, quiet session of relaxation. Alternatively, you may prefer to join an in-person meditation class, or watch a guided video on YouTube.

Keep Doing the Activities You Love

When you feel stressed, it can be easy to give up on the things you love. You might feel like you don't have time to see friends when you have coursework hanging over you. But making sure you leave time for friends, family, art, music, laughing, playing with your pet, or going to clubs is vital. These activities are also likely to take your mind of the source of stress, and help you to feel less isolated, too.

Get Organised

When you feel stressed, you might feel like you are completely overwhelmed. Getting organised can help you feel more in control. Make sure you update a calendar, write down a list of important tasks, or stay on top of your homework. Leaving everything until the last minute, or forgetting to do something, can quickly make you feel even more stressed.



Practice Affirmations

Writing down positive affirmations can help you to develop a more positive attitude. Focus on your strengths, and write down positive statements about yourself. This could include “I always try my best” or “I am a good friend”. Repeat these statements every day, and you will start to develop a more positive attitude.

I have a friend who is stressed. What can I do to help them?

If reading about stress makes you wonder if your friend might be stressed, there are several ways that you can help them:

- Help your friend to recognise that they might be stressed
- See if they can identify what is causing them to feel stressed
- Actively listen to your friend when they talk
- Help them to get physically active
- Invite them to social events, even if they have previously declined an invitation.

If you are concerned about your friend, you do not have to help them on your own. Speak to them to see if they have thought about speaking to an adult about how they feel, such as a parent, teacher, counsellor or another professional.

I think my child is stressed, what are the signs?

It can sometimes be obvious when a child is stressed, but some signs are more subtle. Occasional irritability can be normal in the teenage years, but if your child’s personality has significantly altered, or they appear anxious, withdrawn or overwhelmed, they could be experiencing stress.

Other signs of stress in children and teenagers include:

- Worsening of behaviour
- Change to sleep pattern
- Change to appetite
- Significant weight loss or weight gain
- Dramatic changes in academic performance
- Stomach aches or nausea
- Headaches
- Becoming socially isolated
- Giving up activities they used to love.



What should I do if my child is stressed?

The teenage years are when children often learn to manage stress. While some children seem to adapt quickly, others can become deeply affected by stressful situations.

Talking openly with your child about how they are feeling may help them to open up to you, especially if you approach the conversation in a supportive and non-judgmental manner. If your child can tell you what is causing them to feel stressed, you may be able to offer practical advice if they ask for it.

If your child doesn't want to talk to you, try not to be disheartened and don't give up. They may find it easier to talk to someone impartial such as a teacher, counselor, or their doctor. They may be happy for you to help set this up.

Continue to encourage your child to keep seeing their friends, going to clubs, and completing their schoolwork on time if possible. If this is the first time your child has had to manage their own time, you may be able to help them with prioritising and keeping organised. Helping your child to eat well, get enough sleep and remain physically active may also help them to manage stressful situations.

Bullies intend to hurt someone else, and it can be very upsetting to be the victim of bullying. Our next article will help you learn to recognise if you or a friend have been the victim of bullying, as well as showing you how best to deal with bullies.

Bullying and Cyber-Bullying: How to Recognise It and Deal with It

Bullying can occur in school, outside of school, at clubs, and even if you have a part-time job. The bullying that is often most recognisable occurs in person. It may include being called names, being threatened, or even physically attacked. A more recent form of bullying, cyber-bullying, is any form of bullying that occurs via text, instant message, email or on social media.

Bullying can occur seemingly randomly, or it might be aimed at people because of their gender, race, religion, or sexual orientation. It is important to remember that if you are being bullied, regardless of the reason, the bully's actions are never acceptable.

In this article, we will look in more detail at bullying, and explore what you can do if you, or a friend, experience it.



What is Bullying?

Bullying is behaviour that is intended to hurt someone else. This can take the form of physical assaults, or verbal insults that cause emotional pain. Verbal bullying might include name-calling, making personal insults, persistent teasing or being threatened. The things a bully says might make you believe that you can't defend yourself or stop the bullying from happening.

A survey by Trinity College Dublin found that 16% of secondary students had been bullied at some time. Of the students who were bullied, almost half said they were bullied in the classroom. Bullying also occurred in the corridors, playground, toilets and changing rooms.

What is Cyber-Bullying?

Cyber-bullying is a relatively new form of bullying. It takes place over digital devices include phones, tablets and computers. It could include sending hurtful messages, posting negative, harmful, or false information on social media, or sharing private information or photos with the aim of humiliating or embarrassing someone else.

Cyber-bullying can occur in the following ways:

- Via text message, Whatsapp or any other instant or direct messaging app
- On social media including Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Tik Tok and Facebook
- In chat rooms, online forums, or message boards
- By email
- On any other site that allows for conversation between users.

Cyber-bullying can be particularly upsetting because, unlike other forms of bullying, it is not confined to the school day. In fact, cyber-bullying can sadly occur 24/7. This form of bullying may also be more likely to occur without your teachers noticing.



How Do I Recognise Bullying?

Sometimes, it's not easy to tell if you are being bullied. Bullying, or cyber-bullying, may start slowly before progressing into more unpleasant or aggressive behaviour.



Physical Bullying

It is never ok to hurt someone else. Any type of physical violence or aggression could be a sign of bullying, including hitting, punching, kicking, biting, or being restrained against your will. You may also feel intimidated by someone who bullies you by invading your personal space, or blocks your entry or exit into a room such as a classroom, canteen or changing room.

Emotional Bullying

It can be difficult to know when banter crosses the line into bullying or abuse. If you feel emotionally hurt by what someone else says, or if words are said to threaten, belittle or mock you, then this should not be brushed off as banter.

Banter should be funny for all involved, and not leave the same person feeling victimised every time. For banter to occur within the context of a healthy friendship, you should feel that you and your friends also support and are kind to each other, and share plenty of fun times, too. If you tell someone that their so-called 'banter' upsets you, a true friend will not want to hurt you further and will therefore adjust the way they treat you. However, a bully may tell you that you are over-reacting, making it up, or being pathetic.

If someone regularly shouts, screams or yells at you, then this is likely a sign of bullying. However, offensive words spoken quietly can be just as aggressive or offensive. Being criticised for your size, race, LGBTQ+ status, disability or accent can make you feel isolated and ashamed. Bullies who choose a victim who is part of a minority group do so because it gives them a feeling of power.

If their words or actions play on your mind or make you feel unhappy, this is not a healthy friendship. If someone else's behaviour is hurting you, and you don't feel like you can stop them, you may be experiencing emotional bullying.

Cyber-Bullying

Banter can also occur on social media or in messages. However, if the actions of others online make you feel that you are being joked about, teased, embarrassed, humiliated, ridiculed or left out, then you should consider if this might be cyber-bullying. Social media should be a place to have fun and socialise online, not a platform where others can make you feel bad about yourself.

What Can I Do to Deal with Bullying?

If you feel able to, stand up to the bully. Tell them that they are bullying you and that they should stop. However, you should not be hard on yourself if this feels too difficult.

If confronting the bully is not right for you, speak to a parent, teacher, or another trusted adult for advice and support. It can be scary to speak up, as you may worry that the bully's behaviour will worsen if you report them. However, this is the first step in stopping them from mistreating you (and likely other people, too).

If you decide to confide in a teacher, ask to set up a meeting so that you can speak when no-one else is present. Take a friend or parent with you, if you feel that would help. Your teacher should take your concerns seriously and then follow the school's anti-bullying policy. If you don't feel that the bullying is being taken seriously, keep a diary of what is happening and show another adult so that they can see the evidence.

Some types of bullying should be reported to An Garda Síochána. Physical or sexual assaults, being threatened with a weapon such as a knife, incidences of theft, or being bullied because of your sexual orientation, disability or race can all be formally reported.

If hurtful information is shared about you online, it is wise to screengrab the posts as evidence. Cyber-bullying is often less visible to adults, but by keeping a record, you can show your parents or teachers how the bully treats you online.

It is important to be aware that if someone shares naked photos of you, this is illegal and should be reported to An Garda Síochána. Once you have gathered screengrab evidence, you may feel better if you block or delete that person.



Stop
bullying

I have a friend who is being bullied. What can I do to help them?

It can be hard to see a friend being bullied. However, a bully can have far less impact on someone who is supported by a friend or two.

You could help your friend in one or more of the following ways.

- Ask if your friend thinks they are being bullied. Sometimes it is not obvious to the person who is being targeted.
- Reassure them that the bullying is not their fault.
- Tell them that you value them as a friend, and that you will support them.
- Find others who will also be supportive – this could be other students in your class.
- Encourage your friend to keep a diary of what has been happening.
- Arrange it so that you can be with them in situations where the bullying tends to occur (for example, walking with them between classes).
- Ignore the bully, and try not to respond to any of their taunts.
- If you see the bullying happening, get your friend to leave the situation with you. Leaving is often a good way to diffuse a bully's behaviour.
- Screenshot any negative posts as evidence. Never share negative posts yourself, as this will not only be hurtful to your friend, but could be seen as an endorsement of the bully's behaviour.
- Ask if they would like you to go with them to talk to a teacher or another adult about what has been happening.
- If you report the bullying and nothing improves, follow up with the teacher or another responsible adult.



I think my child is being bullied, what are the signs?

A child who is being bullied may hide this fact from their parents. They may feel embarrassed, ashamed, or worried that if their parent speaks to the school, it will only make things worse.

However, despite a child keeping quiet, certain signs may lead some parents to question whether their child is being bullied. Bullying can increase the presence of the following emotional, behavioural and physical signs.



Emotional or Behavioural Signs

- Mood swings that seem to occur without reason
- Being tearful
- Anger or aggression
- Change to eating (eating more or less than usual)
- Difficulty sleeping
- Becoming withdrawn
- Weight loss or gain
- Losing money, or stealing
- New, negative behaviour towards siblings
- Refusing to go to School
- Frightened to walk to school
- No longer wants to go to clubs or activities
- Worsened academic performance
- Talks of being alone or isolated at school.

Physical Signs of Bullying

- Bruises, scratches or cuts that your child can't explain
- Damage to belongings
- Loss of possessions or clothing
- Returning from school more hungry than usual.

If you are worried about any of these signs, speak to your child. If you are still concerned, arrange an appointment with the school or any clubs that you may be concerned about to see if they share your concerns.



What should I do if my child is being bullied?

Protecting your child is your priority. Where possible, listen to your child so that you fully understand the events that have occurred. Remind your child that bullying is unacceptable, and that it is not their fault. It is normal for children to feel sad, scared, angry or alone, and it will help if you can validate these feelings.

If the bullying has occurred at school, or involves students from the same school, request a meeting with your child's teacher, head of year, or a member of the senior management team. Your child's school should have a policy for dealing with bullying. Ask what will be done to ensure your child's safety, and arrange a follow-up appointment to assess progress.

If bullying has occurred elsewhere, such as a sports' club, raise your concerns with the club directly. You should also inform your child's school so that they are aware that changes in behaviour may be related to bullying occurring outside of school.

One of the most effective ways to maintain a friendship or relationship, or to help someone when they are feeling low, is to actively listen. Active listening involves listening without distractions and giving someone your full attention. Anyone can be an active listener as no special training is required and learning this skill could make a big difference to someone's mental health.

What is Active Listening, and How Can It Help?

Active listening is a way of listening that ensures you are fully committed to hearing what someone else has to say. Learning how to actively listen is particularly beneficial when talking about sensitive or difficult subjects, as those who talk to you will feel valued and heard.

In this article we will look in more detail at what active listening is, how it can help, and how you can develop this skill.



What is Active Listening?

Sometimes when we listen to someone else, we might be distracted by the TV, busy tidying up, or replying to a text at the same time. Although you might hear what the other person is saying, it is much harder to take it in properly and respond in a meaningful way.

Active listening involves giving another person your full attention while they are speaking, so that you can digest what they say and respond thoughtfully. When you listen more attentively, the person speaking knows that you are invested in what they have to say, and this may mean that they feel able to open up to you more. It can also help to strengthen your friendship or relationship and bring you closer to each other.

Sometimes people shy away from listening too closely, as they fear that they will not know what to say or what the 'correct' opinion or advice would be. However, active listening requires you not to give advice or your opinion. With this in mind, try not to worry about your response. It is the act of listening that is reassuring and needed.

Who Can Be an Active Listener?

Although many professionals, including counsellors, doctors and therapists, use active listening, this skill can be developed by anyone! Active listening is something that you can practice each time someone talks to you, so that gradually over time your skills become strengthened.



What Are the Benefits of Active Listening?

Although you might be keen to learn about active listening to support one particular person, once you have acquired this skill you will find that it can be used positively in many situations.

Friendships and Relationships

In friendships, personal and family relationships, being able to actively listen shows those you are close to that you care about their thoughts, feelings and opinions. Being there for someone when they need a friend can strengthen your relationship.

Employment

If you have a part-time job, knowing how to actively listen will help you to form professional relationships with your colleagues. It can be daunting to take your first steps in employment, but showing that you will listen to your colleagues' thoughts for effective collaboration can prove you to be a real asset to the workplace.

Socialising

When you meet new people or spend time with friends, being an active listener will help you to improve your conversation skills. You may feel more confident in getting to know new people, asking questions, or paying attention to the clues body language might give you.

The Characteristics of Good Active Listening

A good active listener will:

- Listen more than they talk
- Be compassionate
- Try to be available to talk whenever needed, or suggest an alternative time if necessary
- Not shy away from painful feelings
- Assure someone that they can speak in confidence
- Accept what someone else says
- Empathise.

A good active listener will not:

- Offer opinions or make judgments
- Belittle someone else's concerns
- Patronise
- Probe into what someone else is thinking
- Give advice
- Offer platitudes such as "it will all be ok"
- Say "I know how you feel"
- Fail to pay attention
- Express shock or surprise
- Talk about their own problems.

How to Be a Good Active Listener

Despite its fancy sounding name, active listening doesn't have to mean doing anything complicated. Here are our top tips for getting to grips with active listening.

1. Maintain eye contact

If someone is talking to you, they will know you are listening if you are looking at them. This doesn't mean you need to stare, but facing them and paying attention will show that you are interested in what they have to say.

2. Don't interrupt

It may be hard for your friend or relative to say everything they need to, and there may be long pauses in their speech. It can be tempting to try to fill the silence, but if you remain quiet, you will probably find that they will continue talking when they are ready.

By resisting the urge to talk, the conversation will not become side-tracked before your friend has had chance to say everything they need to. It also shows that you are willing to wait for them to feel ready to speak.

3. Use gentle encouragement

If a period of silence feels unnatural, or you feel the need to respond, you can use gentle encouragement to show that you are listening. Nodding your head, smiling or making gentle noises such as "uh huh" or "mmm" all show that you are listening without the risk of interrupting their thoughts.

If your friend becomes side-tracked, it may seem that the rest of the conversation will be lost. You can help them get back to the important topic with encouraging sentences such as "we were talking about...".

4. Pay attention to non-verbal cues

Sometimes body language can tell you more than words. Active listening involves paying attention to someone's posture, such as being slumped, appearing tense, or having their arms crossed. They may also appear tearful, angry or exhausted. These cues can all give you clues about how they are feeling.



5. Don't judge or assume

Try to focus only on what is being said, rather than your opinion of what you are hearing. Jumping to conclusions can lead to a negative outcome. If you can withhold judgement, your friend will be able to express themselves fully, and your initial assumptions may be proven wrong anyway.

6. Don't impose opinions

Your friend may not be looking for your opinion. Often, people simply want to get things off their chest rather than being showered with advice. If your friend doesn't seem to want advice, but just needs to offload their thoughts, it is best to keep your opinions to yourself.

7. Stay focused

Ignore all other distractions, such as your phone or the TV, and focus on your friend. If you are finding it hard to concentrate, try to repeat what they have said to make it clearer in your mind. This might feel awkward at first. You can ask your friend, "so, can I just check I understand properly", and then paraphrase what they have said. This is a great way to show you have been paying attention, while also checking that you haven't misunderstood.

8. Don't get distracted planning a response

If you get caught up trying to think about what you can say to your friend, the chances are you're not actively listening. Forget trying to respond, and focus only on what they are saying. You can use gentle encouragement to keep the conversation going.

9. Ask questions

If you are unsure what your friend means, ask a relevant question or see if they can clarify. It is ok to say, "I'm not sure I understand what you mean," as this shows your friend that you do want to understand. It is also helpful to use open questions that will help your friend to elaborate, such as "how do you feel about that?".

10. Summarise

Once it seems that your friend has said everything they need to, you should not try to give advice or offer your opinion. You can summarise by saying "it sounds like you feel that...". If you have got anything wrong, your friend can correct you.

The more you practice active listening, the better you will become at it.

In many cases, advice is not wanted. However, if your friend is looking for help and you are unsure what to say, you can offer to support them by helping them to speak to a teacher, or in contacting a counsellor or their doctor.

Even if you show all of the above active listening qualities, there are some additional things you can do to show your child that you are listening to them properly.

- Come quietly into their world, and allow them to be themselves. Don't try to change them, sometimes simply sitting with them is enough.
- Try very hard to understand what they are saying, even if it doesn't seem to make much sense at first.
- Take note of their point of view, even if you strongly disagree with it.
- Allow your child to make a decision, even if you think it may not be the right one (unless it will endanger them).
- Don't try to take the problem away from them, but support them in dealing with it in their own way.
- Try not to give advice, actively listening is enough.
- Don't offer religious advice unless it is asked for.
- Give your child enough space to make their own discoveries, rather than trying to educate them.
- If your child thanks you for listening, tell them you are glad they spoke to you and that you could be helpful.

Is There Anything I Should Avoid When Listening to My Child?

Your child may feel that you are not listening to them when any of the following occurs:

- You interrupt them before they have finished talking.
- You have a solution or advice to every issue.
- You talk about your own experiences of a similar (or different) issue.
- You talk about an issue that belittles your child's concern, or make a comment such as "some teenagers are far less fortunate than you".
- You criticise your child's speech, accent or grammar.
- You are not fully focused on the conversation, and may be busy doing another chore or looking at your phone.
- You refuse your child's thanks by saying "I haven't done anything".



Final Thoughts on Active Listening

Active listening is a skill that is helpful for conversations that may occur between friends, parents and children, when meeting new people, or in professional situations. Active listening also reduces the chance that someone will feel that you are not paying attention or have your own agenda.

It takes time to learn how to listen attentively, but once you start developing this skill you will find that you are able to have more in depth, constructive, and meaningful conversations.

Periods of poor mental health can happen to anyone at any time in their life. Teenagers go through huge periods of change during adolescence, and this can lead to anxiety, depression, stress or even a mental health crisis. The added stress of the global pandemic has put a huge strain on teenagers, and so if your mental health feels stretched, you are not alone.

No matter how you are feeling, one of the most important things you can do is to tell someone else about your concerns. Friends, family, teachers, counsellors and GPs can all be approached. If the person you choose doesn't offer you the support you need, try someone else.

If you feel very low or anxious, or start having thoughts about hurting yourself or ending your life, this is a sign of a mental health crisis. You must seek help immediately. Doctors and mental health specialists are available to offer practical, emotional, and medical interventions that will help you feel better.

If you are concerned about yourself, your friend or your child, you can seek emergency assistance at any time. FreeText HELP to 50015 24/7 or visit www.ineedhelp.ie. Always call 999 or 112 for Gardaí, Ambulance or Fire if someone is seriously ill or injured, or their life is at risk.

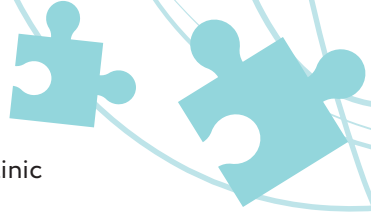


Help and Assistance

If you are concerned about yourself, friends or family get immediate support and information 24/7 by FreeTexting HELP to 50015 from any mobile. Texting 50015 is free of charge from any network and you can text this number even if you have no credit. This service is fully confidential.

Visit www.ineedhelp.ie for more detailed crisis support information on:

- How to help in a crisis
- Emergency Contacts
- National Helplines
- Local Support Groups
- Directions to your nearest GP or out of hours clinic
- Directions to your nearest safe place or refuge



Always call 999 if someone is seriously ill or injured, and their life is at risk. Gardaí / Ambulance / Fire call 999 or 112



An overview of our schools Programme

YSPI developed the Four Steps to Help Programme for Schools with the assistance of Dr Keith Holmes, a consultant child and adolescent psychiatrist, and Medical Director of St John of God's Youth Mental Health Services. We have spent the last two years completing the programme, which is now a comprehensive mental health awareness and suicide prevention programme.

The programme includes:

- A video presentation, "Let's Talk about Mental Health" presented by John Sharpson, that can be played to classes using a web browser and projector.
- Class based workshop presented by our trained facilitator currently available by Zoom Webinar only (Limited Availability)
- A 24 page Student Booklet for each student attending a workshop (now in eco-friendly PDF format for download)
- A Teachers' Handbook which provides in depth information and risk assessments for teachers and youth workers (now in eco-friendly PDF format for download).
- A set of 7 lesson plans which the schools can use to build on the programme workshops (now in eco-friendly PDF format for download).
- Access to Free2Text Crisis Information Service
- Access to local counselling resources by GP Referral through our Youth Crisis Counselling Service
- Access to educational assessments and psychometric evaluations from June 2022

Following feedback from the students themselves we set-up a FreeText Crisis Information Service in 2014. The Free-Text service allows anyone, even if they have no credit, to text HELP to 50015 where they will receive back a list of services that are available 24/7 and are also free to call. They can also visit our Crisis Information website at www.ineedhelp.ie. As of 31st October 2021 we were receiving around 8,000 unique contact requests per month through our Crisis Information Services.



“Let’s Talk about Mental Health” with John Sharpson

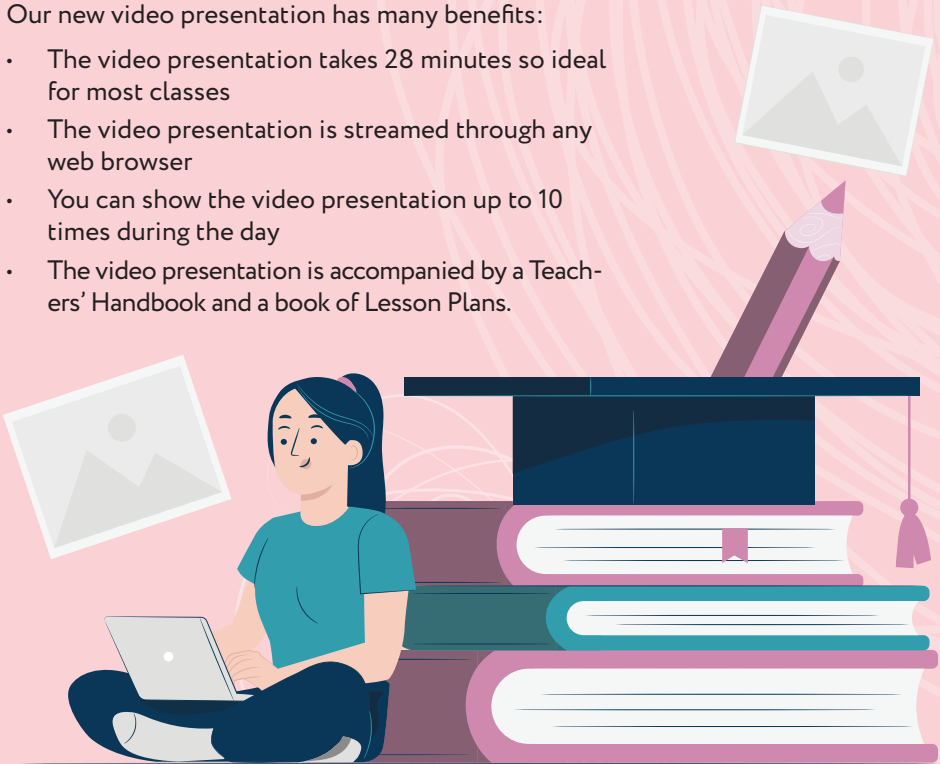
A mental health awareness video workshop streamed directly to your classroom at a time that suits the school schedule.

Due to high demand and ongoing health restrictions it has been very difficult to provide our Schools Programme to all the schools and organisations that have requested a visit. Following consultations with schools and colleges and our own advisory panel we decided in 2021 that we needed to find a better way of providing access to our Mental Health Awareness and Suicide Prevention workshops to students with better value for money and easier access. So we are delighted to announce a new way of providing our Schools Programme, The Let’s Talk about Mental Health Video Presentation.

Working with John Sharpson, aka Múinteoir John, and Macalla Teo, one of Ireland’s leading production companies, we now have an engaging video presentation of our Mental Health Awareness and Suicide Prevention talk that can be booked through our schools website, schools.yspi.ie, and then played to up to 10 classes per day through a standard web browser in your classroom or meeting space.

Our new video presentation has many benefits:

- The video presentation takes 28 minutes so ideal for most classes
- The video presentation is streamed through any web browser
- You can show the video presentation up to 10 times during the day
- The video presentation is accompanied by a Teachers’ Handbook and a book of Lesson Plans.



Youth Crisis Counselling Service

Due to the huge increase in mental health issues since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic all funds raised from our Skydive For Life are going to fund our new Youth Crisis Counselling Programme which will pay for fast, free, access to local counsellors and psychologists for young people in crisis or at immediate risk of suicide or self-harm..

Like most charities we have been overwhelmed by contacts from parents, teachers and teenagers since the start of the COVID-19 lock-down. We have received a 312% increase in requests for urgent crisis support or intervention since the start of the pandemic. So the Trustees have allocated funding to develop and support a new free Crisis Counselling Programme which will fund immediate access to two sessions of crisis counselling, with a registered counsellor, psychotherapist or psychologist, for young people in crisis or at immediate risk of suicide.

This programme is by referral from a GP only. Full information about this service and to make a referral is available at www.youthcrisiscounselling.ie

About Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland

Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland was founded in 2007 as there were no national charities focusing specifically on the problems and issues of youth suicide and self-harm in Ireland.

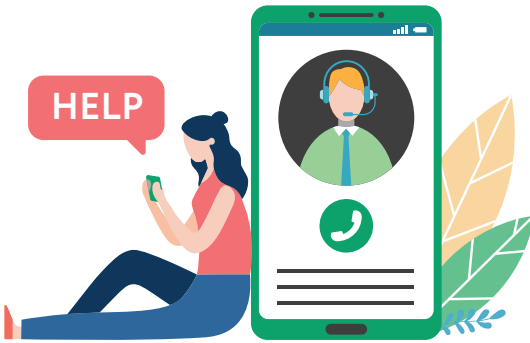
We have never received a euro in State funding in all the time we have been working for the young people of Ireland. All our funding comes from personal supporters so we understand the trust they put in us because we know if we don't live up to that trust there will be no state agency there to bail us out. As of 1st November 2021, the end of our last financial year, it costs us 13c per €1 to run the charity so 87c or 87% of funds we receive are available to fund programmes like the Schools Programme or the Youth Crisis Counselling Service. Our main administrative expenditures are insurance and auditing.

Our Board of Trustees are all volunteers and receive no salary or compensation of any kind for their time and service. Our Trustees are entirely independent and they are not related to each other in any way. Our Trustees do not have charity credit cards or any kind of direct access to charity funds but they have total access 24/7 to the charity's financial records and books so they can assure themselves that your donations are being spent properly.

- Our Trustees, Chief Executive and administrators are not paid for their time or service.
- The charity has no mortgages or major outstanding debts.
- The charity always tries to keep cash reserves of 10% of annual income in case of emergencies.
- The charity has only two contracted staff, both are trained facilitators who provide the National School Visits Programme around the country. They get paid around €25,000 per year each.
- The charity also pays for a part-time book-keeper to keep our accounts, and separate independent auditors to check our accounts are complete and accurate.
- Our latest Annual Report and Audited Financial Statements are available for download from our website www.yspi.ie

Our charity registration is 20070670 and can be verified with the Irish Charities Regulator at www.charitiesregulator.ie. We are a tax-exempt charitable trust approved by the Irish Revenue Commissioners under charity number CHY18438 and the charity is also an approved body under the Charities Donation Scheme.





FreeText HELP to 50015

Texting 50015 is free of charge from any network and you can text this number even if you have no credit. This service is fully confidential and YSPI has no information on mobile numbers that use the FreeText service


For information on:

- Emergency Contacts
- National Helplines
- Local Support Groups
- Directions to your nearest GP or out of hours clinic
- Directions to your nearest safe place or refuge

 www.ineedhelp.ie

Always call 999 if someone is seriously ill or injured, and their life is at risk.

Gardaí / Ambulance / Fire call 999 or 112



**RAISING
FUNDS
FOR YOUTH
SUICIDE
PREVENTION**

Skydive For Life

SKYDIVE.YSPI.IE

**CHARITY
FUNDRAISER**

**Every €500 we raise allows 300 more
students to receive mental health
awareness & suicide prevention training
directly in their schools**

YSPI Youth
Suicide
Prevention
Ireland

**PLEASE SUPPORT
OUR EVENT**

REGISTERED CHARITY 20070670

Let's Talk *about*

MENTAL HEALTH

A Guide to understanding and coping with common mental health issues.

Issues covered in this guide include:

- Warning Signs of a Mental Health Crisis
- Coping With Anxiety
- Coping With Depression
- Coping With Stress
- Coping With Bullying & Cyber-bullying
- Active Listening and how it can help

Help And Assistance

If you are concerned about yourself, friends or family get immediate support and information 24/7 by FreeTexting **HELP** to **50015**. Texting 50015 is free of charge from any network and you can text this number even if you have no credit.

For information on Emergency Contacts, National Helplines, Local Support Groups and your nearest Places of Safety visit www.ineedhelp.ie

Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland

Registered Charity 20070670

83A New Street, Killarney, County Kerry V93 FR59

☎ 1800 828 888 ✉ admin@yspi.ie

🌐 www.yspi.ie 🌐 www.ineedhelp.ie

🌐 schools.yspi.ie 🌐 www.youthcrisiscounselling.ie

