

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](http://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

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# Mental Health *in*

## RURAL AREAS OF IRELAND



**COPING WITH THE PRESSURES OF DAILY LIFE**  
Short guides to coping with common mental health issues

# Mental Health

## RURAL AREAS OF IRELAND

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Overall health and healthcare service provision in rural parts of Ireland may differ from that of individuals living in Ireland's towns and cities. Although overall mental health does not significantly differ between the two groups, there are some factors that may have a substantial impact on the health and wellbeing of those who live in the countryside.

In this article, we will look at the challenges of rural healthcare, as well as offering tips for young people who might be facing mental health issues or feeling isolated.

## Mental Health in Ireland

The Irish population is at greater risk of having a mental health illness than most other countries in Europe. Out of 36 countries, Ireland had the 3rd highest rate of mental health illnesses, including anxiety, depression, and bipolar disorder. The rates of alcohol and drug use were also likely to be higher than elsewhere in Europe.

A number of studies in Ireland have suggested that mental health problems are not significantly higher in rural areas when compared to urban areas. However, suicide rates are higher in rural areas, and mental health services may be harder to access, too.

These findings were backed up by studies into mental health in the USA. Although the prevalence of mental health issues was similar in rural and urban residents, the suicide rate in both adults and children was higher in rural communities. These American studies have also found that the general health of rural communities is poorer than those who live in urban areas.



It is therefore important to understand the triggers for poor mental health in rural areas, and the barriers that might make it harder to access support from mental health services. With better understanding, you can both support your own mental health, and understand how to access specialist services if needed.

## Mental Health Concerns in Rural Ireland



Just under a third of people in Ireland live in a rural area. This means that a large proportion of the population could find it difficult to access the support they need, particularly if a long journey is required to go to a specialist centre or hospital.

Apart from it being less convenient to see a specialist, there are also factors that may specifically affect the mental health of those living in more rural locations.

## Lack of Transport Links

Travel in rural Ireland can be limited, particularly for teenagers who do not have access to a vehicle. Currently, only 53% of people in rural Ireland have access to public transport links to urban centres. Being unable to reach a village, town or city may make you feel that you are missing out on activities that you would enjoy. This might include going to the cinema, shopping in a city, attending music concerts and watching sports events. It may also make it far harder, and more expensive, to reach a train station or airport for travel further afield.



## Feeling Socially Isolated

For teenagers, being able to socialise with friends, attend activities and clubs, and visit towns can feel vital for overall wellbeing. Without being able to drive, you may feel limited to only visiting places that you can travel to on foot or by bicycle. Feeling trapped can quickly lead to feeling low, depressed or lonely.

## Loneliness

Living in remote parts of Ireland can feel lonely for teenagers and adults alike. During the pandemic, the number of people in Ireland who felt lonely greatly increased and those who were younger were more likely to be impacted by loneliness.

Although those who live in remote areas are not necessarily more likely to feel lonely, if you do feel alone in this area then it can be harder to rectify as social events or informal gatherings may be harder to arrange. Feeling lonely can lead young people to feel sad, down, stressed, anxious or depressed.

## Breakdown of Traditional Social Values

Like all countries, even traditional Irish communities have seen movement away from the social traditions of older residents being cared for by family and those living nearby. Not only are the elderly becoming more isolated by this, but younger generations are losing the support and social aspects of spending time with older relatives. Both older and younger rural Irish residents are therefore lacking the benefits that close-knit family support networks once offered.

## How to Manage Feelings of Isolation

If you are feeling isolated, you may find it helpful to try the following:

- Keep active – try to remain physically active. This could include walking, running, or cycling.

- Make use of online events – as a result of the pandemic, more events are now held online or by video link. If you cannot travel to an event, see if it is possible to get a virtual ticket.
- Use video calls – if transport links to your friends are poor, use regular video calls to socialise.
- Consider voluntary work – volunteering to help a neighbour, or taking part in charity work, will not only benefit others but may also help you to feel more connected to those around you.



## Suicide Risk in Ireland

Higher rates of suicide have been noted in rural areas of Ireland, despite the similar levels of mental health issues across the country.

The reasons for the higher suicide rates in rural areas of Ireland are complex. However, in studies of rural communities in Ireland and the USA, the same factors are thought to contribute to this alarming statistic, including:

- Fewer job opportunities or higher rates of unemployment
- Patients needing to travel greater distances to access specialist mental health services
- Difficulty obtaining medications from pharmacies
- Patients being more likely to seek support informally from family, neighbours, churches and other community groups, rather than professionals
- Ongoing stigma regarding mental health illnesses that increases reluctance to access care
- Concerns about patient confidentiality if a doctor is part of the same small community
- Traditional views of masculinity leading to concealment of distress in men
- Alcohol dependency.

## How to Look After Your Mental Health in Rural Areas

Access to mental health services can be more difficult if you live rurally. You may have to travel a greater distance, or feel that you are seen by providers who are less specialised than those working in bigger cities.

Some people in rural areas are also less likely to seek support or treatment for mental health issues for a range of reasons. For those who are worried about the provision of care, or feel reluctant to access mental health services, the following tips may be beneficial.

## Break Down Old-Fashioned Stigma

If you think that you may be experiencing any form of mental health illness, it is important to be aware that healthcare professionals' understanding of mental health is now far better than in the past. Although stigma around mental health may still be present in small communities, struggling with your mental health is not something to be ashamed of. Depression and anxiety do not need to be dealt with stoically or in private, but instead can be managed with specialist care. With the correct support, mental health conditions can be effectively treated to boost how you feel and improve your overall quality of life.



## Use Community Healthcare

Reach out to your doctor or local hospital to access treatment for your mental health. If the required level of treatment is not available locally, they will be able to advise you on a suitable referral or recommended next steps.



## Seek Specialist Support from Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland

Although transport links may be limited in rural areas, online resources are available from Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland (YSPI). A FreeText service is also available for those in need of information in a crisis, as well as access to crisis counselling for teenagers who are deemed to be at-risk. YSPI also provides outreach services around the country for communities who require our services.

## Final Thoughts

The mental health of those living in rural areas is not worse than that of those who live in urban settings. However, certain factors, such as isolation and a lack of transport links, can make it hard for teenagers living in the countryside. If you live in a rural location and are worried about your mental health or the mental health of a friend, you should seek medical advice from a community doctor or at the nearest hospital. If a referral to specialist services is needed, this can be made for you.



## Help and Assistance

If you are concerned about yourself, friends or family you should contact your GP or Out of Hours Service immediately.

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