

MENTAL HEALTH IN CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Children and young people's mental health is currently a hot topic in the media and you will have heard it being talked about much more than usual. However, sometimes it can be difficult to distinguish between normal adolescent behaviour and the development of a mental health problem.

This short information sheet discusses mental health in young people and aims to offer advice and guidance for if you are concerned about a child or young person. After reading this information you will feel more confident and better equipped to assist a young person to seek help for any mental health issues they may be experiencing.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER

Everyone has mental health, just like we all have physical health. However, at times children and young people can struggle to cope and may experience a range of different mental health problems.

Children and young people's mental health problems are a lot more common than you think. Although statistics argue that 1 in 10 children or young people suffer from a diagnosable mental health problem, more recent, accurate figures on the prevalence of mental health problems in young people do not exist. It is estimated that the true figure is actually a lot higher.

The reasons for the rise in the number of children and young people experiencing mental health problems are varied. Young people these days face increased pressures compared with when we were younger. These relate to increased academic pressures and also pressures to look and act a certain way given the advent of social media. An increase in bullying, and the number of children living in poverty, have also been found to contribute to the rise in children and

young people's mental health problems.

With the right help and support most young people will recover from their mental health difficulty. Young people have a much better chance of recovery if their problems are identified early. This is why it is important for you to be familiar with common signs and symptoms which may suggest that a young person is suffering.

It is helpful to encourage a child or young person to see their mental health problem as just a difficult period in their life from which they can get better. Some children even manage to overcome their mental health problem with just a little help and guidance, without receiving any specialist support. It is important not to dismiss or play down a child's mental health problem as this may make them think you don't care or that you see their problems as insignificant.

It can be difficult working with a child or young person who is experiencing a mental health problem. It's essential, therefore, to look after your own health and wellbeing. You cannot be there to help and support a child or young person if you are not feeling well yourself.

HAVING THE CONVERSATIONS

Asking a child or young person how they feel can be difficult, but it is important to do. If they are adamant they do not want to talk, don't push them; they will talk when they are ready, but it is important they know that you are there for them.

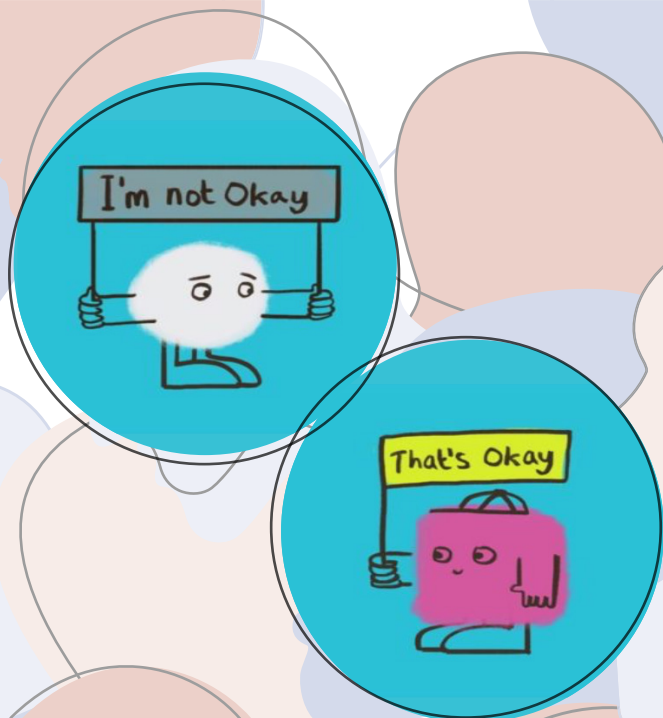
Although different mental health problems have differing signs

and symptoms there are some common characteristics you can look for in a young person which may suggest they may be suffering. Examples of possible deviations to their normal behaviour include changes in appetite, sleeping patterns, personality, mood, behaviour, unexplained physical symptoms, performance at school, withdrawal or avoidance of situations and lack of self-care. If you notice any changes in a child or young person over the course of a couple weeks it is important to have a conversation with them to try to find out how they are feeling.

Before having any conversations think about what you want to say and ask open questions which will allow the child or young person to explain. Be calm and supportive and do not judge how they are feeling.

Although you need to ensure that you respect the young person's privacy, it is vital you make it clear that not all information may be able to be kept confidential. Explain to a young person that any information which puts them or others at risk will need to be passed on to relevant parties.

If a child or young person struggles to talk about how they feel, or has communication difficulties, encourage them to write things down, draw how they feel or use music. It is important for them to try and find a way to express themselves which is helpful for them.



HOW YOU CAN HELP

Having an understanding of common mental health problems in children and young people, as well as knowing what signs and symptoms to look out for, will help you to understand more about how a young person may be feeling. Try to talk about mental health more, and ask questions, encouraging a young person to seek further help if you notice they are struggling.

Lots of self-help materials and resources are available so, if possible, it is useful to encourage a young person to access these. Using these self-help materials will help to facilitate the development of practical strategies to help a child overcome their problems, as well as answering any questions they may have. In addition, linking a young person to self-help information they can read and use at their own pace will allow them some privacy and the opportunity to do this in their own time.

It is important to encourage a child or young person to look after themselves by eating healthily, getting enough exercise and sleeping well. How they feel physically will have a huge impact on their emotional health.

Do not just focus on a child's mental health problem but concentrate on their qualities and what they do well, inspiring the child and the family to do the same. Praise them and encourage them to try out new activities to help to build their confidence and increase their social interaction.

Remember to ask a young person what they think will help them - often they will have ideas that you are unaware of. Also, try to include the family wherever possible as they may be able to help in supporting a child or young person.

GETTING FURTHER HELP

If a child or young person is struggling with their mental health it's a good idea to let their school know so please encourage parents and carers to do this. Many schools offer school-based counselling, and other means of supporting young people's emotional needs, so it is wise to ask for the support of school.

If you think more specialist help is required then you need to suggest a parent takes their child to their GP. Their doctor will then be able to make a referral to Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CYPMHS) if deemed necessary. Some schools can refer directly into CYPMHS which is another reason it is important to keep them informed.

If you think more urgent care is needed, or that the child or young person is at risk of harming themselves, then it is important to take them straight to A&E.

SUMMARY

Remember that the emotional wellbeing of children and young people is just as important as their physical health. However, just like with physical illnesses recovery can often be a long process and will not occur overnight. This is why it is important to be aware of mental health problems, and sources of support available. Many websites, apps and self-help resources are available which help to support children and young people experiencing mental health problems. Nevertheless, it is important to look at reputable websites such as those listed below.

Although it is hoped this guidance will offer you advice and information, it is not a definitive guide and if you are concerned about a child or young person you should seek specialist advice.



USEFUL RESOURCES

www.youngminds.org.uk
www.minded.org.uk
www.cwmt.org.uk
www.nhs.uk

Young Minds Parental Helpline: 0800 802 5544

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