

Young People's Emotional Health

- ▶ For those working with young people aged 16-24
- ▶ Key facts from research
- ▶ Warning signs
- ▶ Sources of help and further information

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Introducing emotional health

Emotional health is about the way we think and feel, and the ability to cope with difficult things in life. If something happens and we feel low emotionally, getting back on track can be difficult.

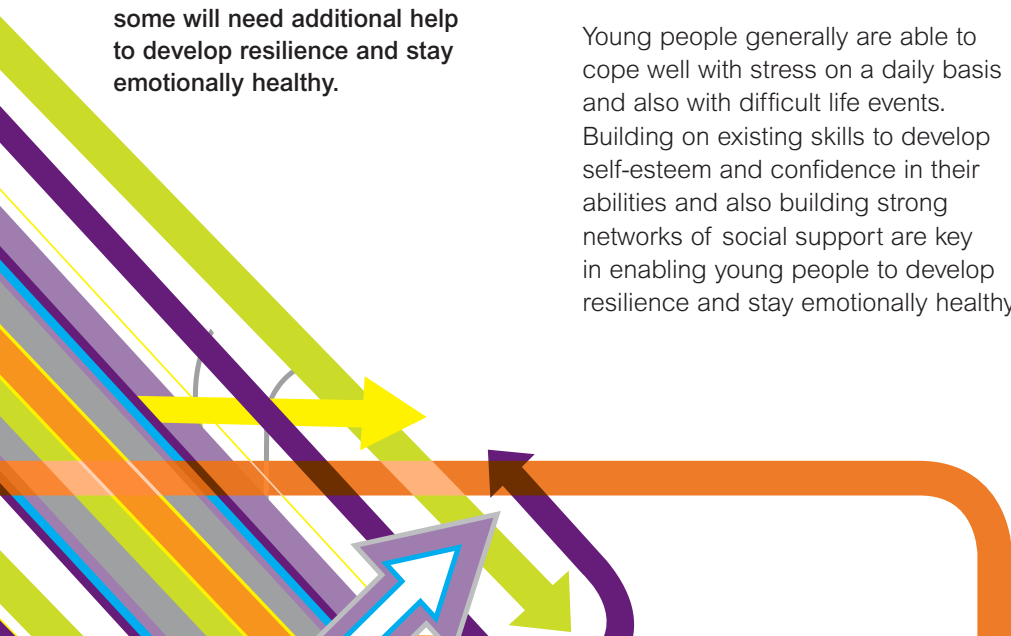
Good emotional health is important for young people as they have to make choices about studying, careers and other areas of their lives. At the same time, young people are also developing greater independence and responsibilities, and experiencing changes in the way they think and feel. Many young people have strong coping strategies and are generally resilient to these challenges, but some will need additional help to develop resilience and stay emotionally healthy.

Being emotionally healthy

Encouraging, supporting and providing opportunities in the following areas may help:

- Talking about things which worry them
- Highlighting their strengths to increase self-esteem and confidence
- Supporting them on things they find difficult and helping them to develop personal coping strategies
- A healthy lifestyle with a balanced diet, plenty of sleep and regular exercise
- Time for relaxation and doing things they enjoy
- Spending time with friends and family
- Providing information on sources of help and support and how these can be accessed.

Young people generally are able to cope well with stress on a daily basis and also with difficult life events. Building on existing skills to develop self-esteem and confidence in their abilities and also building strong networks of social support are key in enabling young people to develop resilience and stay emotionally healthy.



Warning signs:

Among the opportunities and independence which young people experience, there are challenges, key choices, new experiences and difficult life events. As their resilience is tested, young people may show some of the following warning signs of poor emotional health:

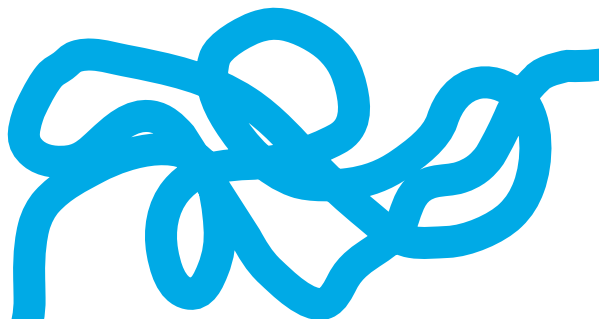
- Lacking energy or appearing particularly tired
- Appearing more tearful
- Not wanting to talk or be with people
- Not wanting to do things they usually enjoy
- Eating, drinking or sleeping more or less than usual
- Using alcohol or drugs to cope with feelings
- Finding it hard to cope with everyday things
- Appearing restless and agitated
- Not liking or taking care of themselves or feeling they don't matter.

Although warning signs may go some way to identify young people with poor emotional health, emotional distress and despair are not always observable.

Due to personal experiences and circumstances, some young people may find it harder to cope than others. Young people in the following groups are at increased risk:

- Bereaved or other loss
- Young offenders or ex-prisoners
- Homeless
- Unemployed
- Looked after
- Without social networks of support.

There may be differences in coping strategies and expressions of poor emotional health, with young women more likely to focus on emotions and young men more likely to focus on avoiding problems.

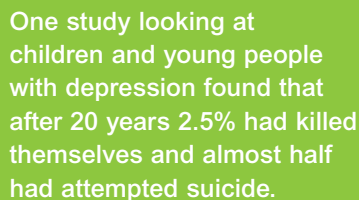




Depression:

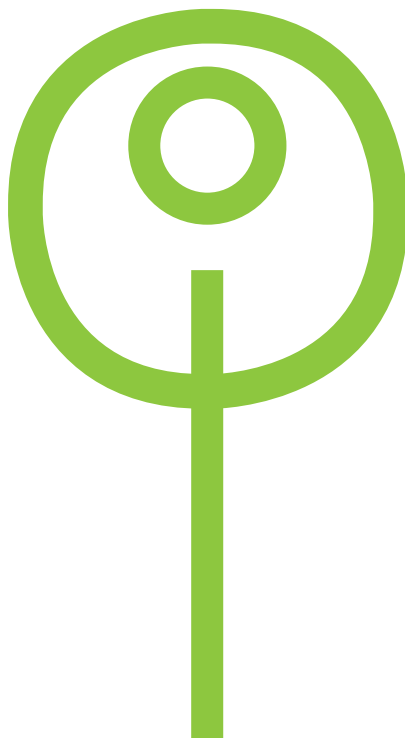
Levels of reported depression vary between populations and also with different methods and definitions. One study reports 30% of young people having at least one indicator of depression while others indicate prevalence up to 1 in 20 for major depression. Depression is more commonly reported among young women than among young men.

Depression in young people may begin more slowly and less noticeably than among adults. Particularly for young people up to 18 years, it often involves irritability rather than sadness. Depression is usually accompanied by other disorders and young people with depression may also have problems with family, friends, relationships and difficulties with academic work. Depression is the strongest risk factor for suicide.



One study looking at children and young people with depression found that after 20 years 2.5% had killed themselves and almost half had attempted suicide.

There is a lack of clear evidence about the effectiveness of methods for preventing and treating depression among young people. Research with young people indicates that they do not recognise depression as a major general health problem and that there is reluctance to get professional help.



Self-harm:

Self-harm is usually defined as deliberately causing injury or harm with a non-fatal outcome, for example, through cutting, burning or poisoning.

Young women are more likely to self-harm than young men, with one study indicating four times more young women than young men self-harm. Young people are more likely to self-harm if they are experiencing one or more of the following:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Impulsivity
- Low self-esteem
- Higher levels of drug, alcohol use and smoking
- Problems with work and personal relationships
- Sexual and physical abuse
- Bullying
- Concerns about sexual orientation.

Information about the prevalence of self-harm varies considerably because it relies on surveys and hospital admission data. An individual may self-harm occasionally or regularly and physical effects can vary from minor injury to medically serious injury.

Only a small proportion of young people who self-harm obtain hospital treatment. Estimates based on research indicate that between 20,000 and 30,000 young people receive hospital treatment following self-inflicted injuries or overdoses each year in the UK.

Young women aged 15-19 are one of the largest groups of people attending hospital following deliberate self-harm.

Research with young people shows the following about their reasons for self-harming:

Most common feelings

- Wanting relief
- Wanting to die
- Wanting to punish themselves

Least common feelings

- Wanting attention
- Showing desperation
- Frightening someone

Suicide:

Suicide is the act of a person consciously ending their own life. Some definitions include all self-harm which ends in death.

As suicide is not a criminal offence, 'dying by suicide', 'ending your life' or 'killing yourself' is generally considered more appropriate language than 'committing suicide'.

It is very difficult to establish rates of suicide attempts because data relies on surveys or hospital admission rates, both of which may underestimate true rates. However, studies have found that:

- 20-45% of older adolescents report having suicidal thoughts at some point.
- 6.4% of young people report attempting suicide in the previous year.
- 9.7% of young people report having attempted suicide at some point in their life.

Suicide is one of the leading causes of death of young people aged 15-24. Young people who kill themselves have often experienced difficulties over a long period of time. Untreated depression, personality and relationship difficulties at the time of suicide are common.

- 45% of young people who end their life have a known history of self-harm.
- 25-50% of young people who die by suicide have made at least one previous attempt.
- An average of two young people

aged 15-24 kill themselves each day in the UK and Republic of Ireland.

- An average of 529 men (12 per 100,000) and 140 women (3 per 100,000) aged 15-24 died by suicide in each year between 2003-2007.

Young women are much more likely than young men to report suicidal thoughts, plans and attempts.

However, young men are at a higher risk of killing themselves than young women, especially with the following risk factors:

- mental health problems
- family or school related difficulties
- problems in childhood or early adolescence
- history of self-harm or previous suicide attempts
- young offender or ex-prisoner
- survivor of abuse.

The latest suicide data is available at: www.samaritans.org/about_samaritans/facts_and_figures.aspx

Being affected by another's suicide can result in poor emotional health and can increase the risk of others dying by suicide.

Research shows that asking someone if they are feeling suicidal does not increase distress amongst suicidal people and does not increase the likelihood of others feeling suicidal.

How can I help?

As well as supporting young people to develop emotionally healthy lifestyles, there may be individuals who are worried about, perhaps because they are showing some of the warning signs listed earlier.

Your role in supporting individuals may vary depending on your professional role, your relationship with the individual concerned and other support available. However, the following information may be helpful:

- Young people are generally reluctant to seek help from adults including professionals because of embarrassment, not feeling understood and feeling no one can help. They are often more likely to ask family and especially friends for support.
- Young people value being listened to in confidence by someone who is kind, caring,

sympathetic, non-judgemental and who does not patronise them. Asking open questions and taking time to listen to the young person will facilitate this.

- Poor emotional health may result from a combination of different factors – including specific things happening in an individual's life and wider influences relating to their family, peers or local circumstances. This means that multifaceted support is more likely to be effective than a single intervention.
- Support which acknowledges a young person's existing skills and strengths may help them to increase their self-esteem while getting help.

Look after yourself:

Supporting young people with emotional health difficulties can be distressing for you too. We would encourage you to keep a colleague informed so that you can get some support yourself. Take care not to take on other people's problems to the detriment of your own emotional health. If you feel affected by the support you are providing or don't feel you can confide in a colleague, you can contact Samaritans for confidential support.

Sources of help and further information:



Samaritans is a confidential emotional support service available 24 hours a day for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which may lead to suicide.

08457 90 90 90* (UK) 1850 60 90 90* (ROI) jo@samaritans.org

Contact us in person by finding your local branch on www.samaritans.org

Write to: **Chris, PO Box 90 90, Stirling FK8 2SA**

Get Connected Confidential support and information to help anyone under 25 decide what they want to do next. **Freephone 0808 808 4994** 1pm-11pm 7 days a week help@getconnected.org.uk
For more information and webchat go to: www.getconnected.org

BBC Mental Health Information

www.bbc.co.uk/health/conditions/mental_health/

Information about conditions, coping, supporting, therapies and medication.

TheSite.org 'Your guide to the real world'

Information, support and guidance for young adults. www.TheSite.org

Royal College of Psychiatrists www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinfoforall.aspx

Leaflets containing information about mental health problems.

Mind www.mind.org.uk/Information/

Factsheets and booklets on numerous areas of mental health.

* Please see our website for latest call charge details. Samaritans is a registered charity and relies on volunteers and donations to continue its work. If you would like to support Samaritans, please visit www.samaritans.org

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