



Noticing the signs: Supporting young people's mental health



Understanding mental health

Mental health is a way of describing social and emotional wellbeing. It affects how young people adjust to change, develop relationships and deal with life's challenges.

Understanding that mental health ranges from well to unwell helps to determine what sort of help may be needed. A young person with frequent and persistent symptoms that interfere with everyday activities could benefit from extra support and professional help.



Being 'well' or 'coping' doesn't mean that we're not experiencing any challenges. Life is full of challenges!

Well or coping for young people, is when they:

- can bounce back from challenges with support
- have good relationships with friends and family
- have healthy routines around activities, food, and sleep.

The earlier we can notice a change in behaviour indicating a young person may be struggling, the sooner we can assist them to get the support they need. Getting the right help early can reduce the impact on everyday life and leads to a quicker recovery.



**Black Dog
Institute**

BETTER MENTAL HEALTH



Signs someone is struggling or unwell

Emotional and behavioural changes

- Persistent sadness, irritability, anger, or anxiety
- Low self-esteem or negative self-talk
- Loss of interest in hobbies or usual activities
- Difficulty concentrating or a drop in school/work performance
- Trouble connecting with peers or withdrawing socially
- Expressing hopelessness or saying life isn't worth living

Physical and lifestyle shifts

- Changes in sleep patterns—too little or too much
- Noticeable changes in appetite or weight
- Neglecting personal hygiene or appearing unkempt
- Signs of physical harm (e.g. cuts, bruises)

Risky or concerning behaviour

- Involvement in fights or aggressive behaviour
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Sharing unusual or distressing thoughts

Sometimes it can be hard to discern changes in behaviour from usual reactions to challenges.

Look out for:

- Multiple signs different from their usual behaviour
- Changes that persist over time
- Disruptions to their usual routine and functioning



What can you do

Keep the connection strong with your young person and be involved in their lives so that you can notice changes in behaviour and have opportunities for supportive conversations.

Talk to them about how they are coping with life's stressors. This can help you understand if they are struggling (even if you haven't noticed a change in behaviour).

Remember a non-judgmental conversation can open the door to support. If you notice several of these signs, it's important to calmly check in with the young person to understand what additional support could be helpful.

To learn more about how to have a mental health conversation with a young person, visit [headspace](#).



Where to get help

There are a wide range of options for help depending on the level of support required.

Immediate help in an emergency

- Emergency services **000**

Support in a crisis

- Beyondblue www.beyondblue.org.au
- Lifeline Australia 13 11 14 www.lifeline.org.au
- 13YARN 13 92 76 www.13yarn.org.au
- Suicide Callback Service 1300 659 467 www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au

Digital mental health resources and support for young people

- Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 kidshelpline.com.au
- [Black Dog Institute's Youth Mental Fitness Hub](#)

Support for parents and carers

- Mental Health Carers Australia www.mentalhealthcarersaustralia.org.au



Professionals who can help

Mental health crisis team

In every Australian state/territory there are special teams who support people experiencing mental health crises. These teams have different names in each state (commonly referred to as mental health crisis and treatment teams). The phone lines are open 24/7 for advice when someone is at risk to themselves or to others.

GP

Your GP is a good start when looking for support for your young person. A GP can assess physical and mental health and determine the best next steps. They have a good understanding of local mental health services available and can give referrals. GP support can include a Mental Health Treatment Plan (with a Medicare rebate for up to 10 sessions with a private psychologist). Select a 'long appointment' with the GP (generally 30 minutes) for enough time to discuss current issues and develop a mental health care plan.

Watch this video for more information about GPs.

Psychologist

Psychologists can work privately, in GP practices, and for community agencies like Headspace. They use evidence-based psychological treatments to assess and treat mental health conditions and help develop coping strategies for challenging life events. Some services, like Headspace, are free, and others have private fees (but these can sometimes be reduced with a GP referral).

Watch this video for more information about psychologists.

Counsellor

'Counsellor' is a generic term used to describe professionals who offer some type of talking therapy.

A counsellor can be a:

- psychologist
- nurse
- social worker
- occupational therapist (OT)
- or someone with a counselling qualification (Bachelor or Master of Counselling degree).

Counsellors can work in private practices, community health centres, schools and universities, and youth services.

School counsellor or school-based wellbeing role

All schools have staff dedicated to supporting student wellbeing. This can include:

- the school counsellor
- student support officers
- pastoral care staff.

While none of these roles can provide long-term psychological treatment, they can be included in the young person's support team. Involving the school might feel unnecessary at first, but it's important to remember that school is where young people spend the most time. Working with the school can ensure your young person receives the support they need when they are not with you.

Watch this video for more information about counsellors.



It's important that you and your young person feel comfortable and safe, heard and supported by your psychologist/counsellor. Also that you have a clear understanding of the treatment goals and methods. If it's not feeling right, talk it through with the counsellor/psychologist about what can be improved. If it is still not working, don't give up; be open to trying with someone else.

University/TAFE student support services

Universities and TAFE can provide support to students such as confidential counselling, peer support, student wellbeing services and in-person and online resources. You can find information about the support offered from each university and state TAFE websites.

Employee Assistance Program

Many workplaces offer free counselling to employees and their family members through Employee Assistance Programs (EAP). These are usually short-term but can be a good starting point or a type of interim support until you can access another service.

Digital mental health resources

Digital mental health services are programs or applications delivered online or over the phone. These include support, advice, information, and treatment. There is so much available online, it can be difficult to navigate your way to the right options. The following can be helpful to find something right for you and your young person.



Quality
Use of
Medicines
ALLIANCE



Helping consumers and health professionals make safe and wise decisions about medicines and diagnostics. Funded by the Australian Government through the Quality Use of Diagnostics, Therapeutics and Pathology Program.