



The Charlie Waller Memorial Trust
Depression – let's get talking

Mental health problems in children and young people: guidance for parents and carers

Looking after a child or young person who has emotional or mental health problems can be very hard. You may feel challenged, isolated, scared and deeply upset and wish you knew where to turn for help.

What is this leaflet for?

This leaflet offers guidance on how best to support your child and where to find further advice and help with their mental health.

Be assured, things can improve for your child. Mental health, like physical health, is relevant to all of us, including children and young people. Problems are often temporary and, with support, can change for the better.

Seeking help

“The younger generation will hopefully grow up where mental health is not something that is ignored but something that should have everyone’s attention.” Teacher

You are not alone. Many parents and carers have similar concerns and stresses, although they may not feel able to discuss them openly. There is good support and guidance, through national and local organisations. On the back of this leaflet is a list of reliable organisations that offer information based on sound evidence. Do have a look to find out which sources of support might be best for you.

The sooner you seek help, the better. Every local area is different but the three places listed below are a good place to start.

Talk to your GP

Your GP will listen, begin to understand your child's needs and suggest the most appropriate course of action or support for your child, including referral to mental health specialists, if necessary.

So, make an appointment for your child and explain your concerns when you do so. You might also find it helpful to make a second appointment with the GP, for yourself, to discuss the “ripple effects” of your child's difficulties on the rest of the family.

“[I spoke] about my hopelessness and sadness to a teacher, who called my Mum, and arranged for us to see my GP. A year later, I have just turned 16 and am in a completely different place to where I was a year ago.”

Help at school

School is an important part of the picture when it comes to children's mental health. It's a good idea to stay in communication with the school about the issues your child is experiencing. There may well be sources of help and support within the school, so do encourage your child to talk to a trusted teacher or member of support staff.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

Some local CAMHS services have a Single Point of Access (SPA) to help children, young people and their families get the help they need. Some services need a referral from a GP, school or social care, but some accept direct contact from families. Look up your local CAMHS on the internet to find out what may be available.

What you can do to help your child

As a parent you can have a crucial role in your child's recovery. The more you can understand about mental health and your child's difficulties, the more confident you will be in supporting them. Getting professional help can be important but there is a great deal you can do as a parent too. Every case is individual, but these general tips might help you to help your child:

Encourage them to talk

Try 'open-ended' questions like, “How are things for you?” “What's happening with you?” “What do you think or feel about...?” or “What's on your mind?”, rather than questions that have “yes/no” answers. When discussing their problem, don't try to 'fix' it. For the most part, young people simply need to know you are there to support them.

Listen and be understanding

Listen calmly and try not to judge your child. Let them know you are happy to listen while they chat about anything and everything, whenever they want to. Never underestimate the importance of being an attentive, non-judgmental listener. Remember, you don't need to know all the answers, listening without responding is often enough.

Give your child reliable self-help information from trusted sources, based on sound evidence

They can read and use this at their own pace, allowing them some privacy, but at the same time you are showing you are there to help and they are not alone. Peer-to-peer support can be really useful. Self-help links include:

- elefriends.org.uk
- youthspace.me
- epicfriends.co.uk
- healthtalk.org
- studentsagainstd Depression.org

Tell them, and show them, how much you care and how important they are in the family

It is not easy when stress levels are high, but a peaceful, loving home life can really help recovery. Keep family routines as normal as possible and do simple things together – maybe watching a film, or having a meal, going for a walk or playing a game. Just doing simple everyday things together (like grocery shopping or cooking) can provide a really helpful distraction. This can bring everyone in the family closer.

Enjoy the time you spend together but understand that it might be a while before your child starts enjoying activities again. Try not to pressurise them and, if they need a little space, support them with that while not leaving them isolated.

Understand the problems

As with physical health, there are many different ways of experiencing mental health issues. Try to read up on your child's specific problems. This will help you understand their experiences and what helps recovery, building their confidence for the future.

Encourage social contact with friends and family

Encourage your child to go out (if only for short periods) and to keep in touch with friends.

Simple physical activity

Taking regular exercise, such as going for walks, can help improve mood and reduce anxiety.

Know that recovery will not happen overnight

As a parent or carer, you want to make your child feel better immediately but, like physical health problems, mental health problems can sometimes take time to improve and some, such as eating disorders, may be complex and seem illogical. There will often be ups and downs in recovery.

Don't be afraid to seek further advice from mental health professionals

Many of them have a great deal of experience and are generally an excellent source of guidance and support close to where you live, though it is worth being aware that you may have to wait longer in some areas than others.

Don't blame yourself

Parents or carers often feel guilty, thinking they have caused the problems, perhaps through genetics or the home life they have created. Usually, this is not the case.

Look after yourself

In order to support your child, you need to stay strong and well yourself. Often it helps to talk to someone, so don't be scared about doing this, with friends, family or a parent helpline like the one provided by Young Minds <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/> 0800 802 5544



National organisations which help parents

Young Minds is an excellent source of information about all aspects of child mental health, including a Parent Helpline: 0800 802 5544.
<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/>

The Royal College of Psychiatrists has a detailed section on help for the whole family
www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/parents-and-young-people and provides guidance on all mental health problems and treatments, with downloadable leaflets. www.rcpsych.ac.uk

Minded for Families provides free, quality-assured advice which is easy to understand. It is helpful for any adults caring for children or teenagers with mental health problems.
<https://mindedforfamilies.org.uk/young-people/>

Samaritans provides 24 hour, nationwide support by phone: 116123, email: jo@samaritans.org and face-to-face for stress, anxiety or despair related issues, including suicide. www.samaritans.org

Papyrus offers advice and support from qualified professionals about suicide. This is for anyone up to the age of 35 who is having suicidal thoughts and for their friends and families. They can be contacted through the website www.papyrus-uk.org or on their "Hopeline": 0800 068 4141 or 07786 209 697 (open 10am - 10pm weekdays and 10am - 2pm weekends)

Beat gives clear advice on all aspects of dealing with eating disorders, including helpful guidance to parents, carers and families.
www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk

Sane 0300 304 7000 offers out of hours, 6pm - 11pm daily, specialist support and information to anyone affected by mental illness, including family and carers.

Anna Freud Centre – a leaflet about mental health for parents of young children:
www.annafreud.org/media/7228/tmh-parent-leaflet-final-all-approved-laid-out-for-web.pdf

Local organisations which help parents

At the **Charlie Waller Memorial Trust** we produce booklets and posters on many aspects of mental health. These are free to download or order and include our Parent's Guide to Depression:
www.cwmt.org.uk/parents-guide



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