

5 - 11 February 2024

Children's mental health week is run through [Place2Be](#), a children's mental health charity that provides counselling, support and training in UK schools.



The first Children's mental health week was held in 2015 and was set up to highlight the importance of children and young people's mental health.

This year's theme is My Voice Matters. This week is about empowering young people to use their voices, share what matters to them, and encourage those around them to hear their voices. For more details click [here](#).

According to [Place2Be](#) around one in five children and young people have a probable mental health problem, which may continue into adulthood. 50% of adults with lifetime mental health problems first experienced symptoms by the age of 14.

Like adults, the emotional wellbeing of children and young people is just as important as their physical health. Good mental health will allow them to develop the resilience to cope with life's ups and downs and to grow into well-rounded, healthy adults.

Some of the mental health problems that can affect children and young people are:



Depression

is more common in teenagers than younger children, but affects more young people today than it did a few decades ago.

Self-harm

is where somebody intentionally damages or injures themselves. It is a common problem amongst young people.

Anxiety

can be triggered when changes happen in children's lives, for example, changing schools. If anxious thoughts affect a child's every day thoughts and behaviour, they may need professional help.

Eating disorder

is when you have an unhealthy attitude to food, types include anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa. The condition is most common in young women aged between 13 and 17.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

(ADHD) is a condition that affects your behaviour and those with it tend to be restless and struggle to concentrate.

Post-traumatic stress disorder

(PTSD) is a disorder caused by an extremely frightening or stressful event or situation, for example, physical abuse, witnessing or being the victim of violence or extreme bullying.

Growing up is not easy, and sometimes it's hard for children to cope with what is going on in their life.

Most children grow up mentally healthy,

but surveys suggest that more children and young people have problems with their mental health today than 30 years ago. It's suspected that this is probably because of changes in the way we live now and how that affects the experience of growing up.



How to help your child



As a parent you can help your child by having an open relationship, which encourages your child to talk to you if they are troubled. Listening and taking their feelings seriously is the most important way you can help. They may just want you to listen or to have a hug, or they may want more practical help.

If your child's negative feelings don't pass over time, you may want to consider obtaining some professional help, initially talk to your GP and see what they suggest.

It's also a good idea to talk to your child's teacher at school, to establish if how they are feeling is affecting their school work or friendships.

They may have a school counsellor that your child can talk to. Different professionals often work together in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) run through the NHS.

Like adults, children will respond to situations differently. Depending on what is bothering them, they may be more clingy, anxious, withdrawn, angry or agitated. Remember to listen to your children and re-assure them.

Keep routines where possible or create new ones, building in time for learning, play and relaxation.

The best way to communicate to your children is by talking about worrying news with open, confident, clear and truthful facts.

Things that can help keep children and young people to stay mentally well include:

- being in good physical health, eating a balanced diet and getting regular exercise
- having time and the freedom to play, both indoors and outdoors
- being part of a family that gets along well most of the time
- going to a school that looks after the wellbeing of all its pupils
- taking part in local activities for young people
- feeling loved, trusted, understood, valued and safe
- being able to enjoy themselves
- being able to learn and having opportunities to succeed
- accepting who they are and recognising what they are good at
- having a sense of belonging in their family, school and community
- feeling they have some control over their own life
- having the strength to cope when something goes wrong and the ability to solve problems



Here are some helpful tips:

News – the important thing about seeing or hearing the news is balance. Don't force children to watch or hear news or shield them from it. Discourage overexposure, small doses of real life news are helpful, whereas large doses may have a negative impact on children.

Questions – answer your children's questions truthfully and let them know the facts about any situation. It is common for children to have misunderstandings about events so encourage them to ask questions, so you can correct any confusion. If you don't know the answer to a question they ask you, explain you don't know and then find out the answer and let them know.

Support – make sure you are there to support your children and let them know they are safe and loved.



Worry – let them know that it is normal to worry and that bad things happen, but not very often, so they do not need to be scared.

Time – ensure you find the right time to talk about what is worrying your child. If your child starts asking questions at an inconvenient time explain to them that you would like to talk to them about it later and invite them to remind you, so they know you really are interested.



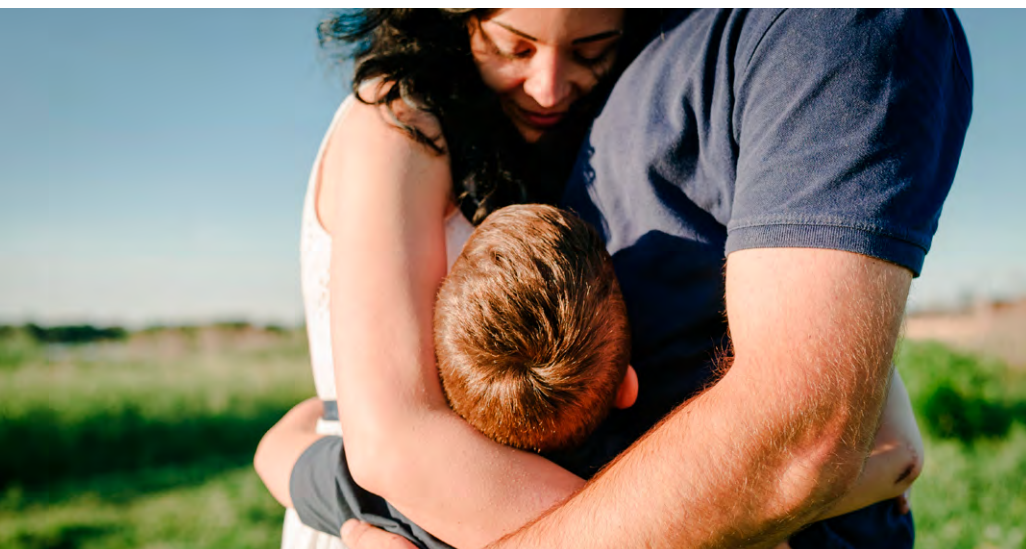
Repetition – remember that children tend to repeat themselves when they are feeling uncertain or worried. They may need to ask the same question a number of times until they are feeling more reassured.

Truthful – be as truthful as possible. It can be tempting, when children ask a direct or tricky question, to avoid it by bending the truth. This can be unhelpful when they are talking to others about what happened. It is often more helpful to be as honest as possible.

Age appropriate – tailor the conversation to their age. All children have different temperaments and sensitivities. Their ability to understand the world, take in and react to bad news will depend on their age. If you have more than one child, you might want to talk about the news with them individually and tailor what you say to their needs and level.



At the end of each day talk about the things in the day that you have been grateful for, it will very quickly become a habit and help children to find the positive, no matter how small, in even the worst of days.



Organisations that can help:

[ChildLine](#)

[YoungMinds](#)

[Contact a Family](#)

[Family Lives](#)

[Barnardo's](#)

[NHS](#)

[Mental health foundation](#)

[Penumbra \(Scotland\)](#)

[CALM \(Campaign Against Living Miserably\)](#)

[PAPYRUS \(Prevention of Young Suicide\)](#)

[Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition \(CYPMHC\)](#)



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