

# Supporting young people's mental health

## A Guide for Parents & Carers

Perth Metro Suicide Prevention Coordination  
Updated 2026



## Acknowledgments

This resource was prepared by Perth Metropolitan Suicide Prevention Coordinators with members of the Metropolitan Suicide Postvention Development Group and the Metropolitan Suicide Reference Group.

Many thanks to everyone who contributed.

## Disclaimer

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Neami National is not responsible for the suitability of the information for your organisation's specific circumstances, or any actions taken as a result of the information included in this guide. You must make your own assessment of the information contained in this document and whether or not you choose to rely on it.

## Reader advisory

This document includes information about suicide and related topics, which may be distressing to some readers. If you find the content overwhelming or upsetting, consider reaching out to a trusted friend, support person, Lifeline on 13 11 14 or one of the helplines listed on [page 13](#).

In an emergency, call Triple Zero (000).

Please advise of any changes to the services listed via:  
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Neami is committed to cultivating inclusive environments for staff, consumers and carers. We celebrate, value and include people of all backgrounds, genders, sexualities, cultures, bodies and abilities.



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## Purpose of this guide

Our Parents and Carers Guide offers practical, evidence-based information to help you support the young person in your life who may be struggling with their mental health.

## Young People and Mental health

Mental health is a vital part of every young person's overall wellbeing – just as important as physical health. Growing up comes with many challenges, and as children transition into adolescence and earlier adulthood, emotional changes are common and natural.

It's not unusual for young people to feel sad, stressed, angry or anxious from time to time. However, when these feelings persist and begin to affect their daily life – such as school, relationships or sleep – it may be a sign that they need extra support.

Research from the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that almost 40% of Australians aged 16 to 24 experienced a mental health condition in the past year, with anxiety disorders being the most common. Mental health challenges can vary widely in how they show up and how they impact individuals.

As a parent or caregiver, it's helpful to know the signs of mental health challenges and what support to offer. Early action and understanding can make a big difference, helping young people feel seen, supported and empowered to seek help when needed.





## Important mental health facts every parent or carer should know

- Mental health conditions were the leading illnesses impacting young Australians aged 15–24 in 2023.
- In the past 12 months, 8.7% of females aged 16 - 24 reported engaging in self-harm, compared to 3.3% of males in the same age group.
- 38.8% of people aged 16 - 24 years had a 12-month mental disorder
- Among young people aged 16–24, 26% experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress. Young women were notably more affected, with 34% reporting distress compared to 18% of young men.
- Suicide is the leading cause of death among young Australians, with mental health conditions a common risk factor for young people.

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## What young people have said about seeking help

Insights from headspace tell us that:

- Young people report they'd feel worse if they couldn't solve their mental health problems alone, and that other people's expectations are a reason they wouldn't reach out for help
- 2 in 5 young people say they prefer to deal with mental health challenges on their own

These findings emphasise the importance of reminding young people that they're not alone, and that help and support are available.

As parents and carers, we play an important role in creating safe spaces for conversation. Learning how to talk openly, listen effectively and respond without judgement equips us to support young people's wellbeing more confidently.

## When should you be worried?

It's natural for young people to experience emotional ups and downs. As a parent or carer, distinguishing between typical changes and what are concerning behaviours can be challenging.

The following questions can help you reflect a young person's wellbeing, and help you choose whether a conversation or seeking further support could be helpful:

- Have you noticed a change in behaviour?
- Is this change across multiple settings (e.g. home, school, work)?
- Is this behaviour occurring frequently?
- Has this been going on for more than two weeks?
- Is this change impacting on the young person's day to day life (e.g. school work, relationships)?

If you've answered yes to any of these questions, consider speaking with the young person or discussing what you've noticed with a health professional.





# How to start supportive conversations with a young person about mental health

## Talking and listening

- Listen actively and without distraction. Create a calm space where your full attention is on the young person.
- Maintain a relaxed, open posture and respectful eye contact. This fosters safety and trust.
- Use open-ended questions to encourage conversation and allow thoughts to flow without pressure.
- Acknowledge emotions with empathy. Validate how they're feeling without rushing to fix or advise.
- Gently express concern. If you've noticed changes in their behaviour or appearance, share your observations with care.
- Be present, even if they're not ready to talk. Your interest shows you're available and open to support.
- Ask thoughtful questions, but don't overwhelm. Focus on understanding, not investigating.
- Respect their boundaries. If they're not ready to open up to you, reassure them that you're here when they are.
- Build your confidence in mental health conversations. Reading about anxiety, depression and youth experiences can help you respond more effectively.
- Offer alternative ways to connect. If talking feels difficult, consider writing a note or sending a message.

## Showing understanding

- Educate yourself on mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression. The more informed you are, the better equipped you will be to help the young person.
- Offer reassurance. Let them know that mental health support is available and they don't have to face things alone.
- Ask how you can assist. Some young people may want space, while others may appreciate practical help – support looks different for everyone.

## Encouraging help-seeking

- Promote help-seeking. Encourage the young person to access professional support when needed.
- Let them know that help is available and they're not alone.
- Ask how you can best support them. Everyone's needs are different and may change over time.

## Conversation starters

These conversation starters are designed to help parents and carers connect with young people. They could be used you're walking the dog, driving home from school, or sharing a meal. They aim to encourage trust, reflection and connection, so young people feel supported.

- 'I've noticed you've seemed a bit quiet - want to talk about anything?'
- 'You haven't seemed like yourself lately. How are things?'
- 'You seem a little stressed - what's been happening for you?'
- 'Just letting you know I care, and we can figure things out together.'
- 'I'm here for you whenever you feel ready.'
- 'If you had to describe your mood today in one word, what would it be?'
- 'On a scale of 1 to 10, how's your stress level right now?'

**If you had to describe your mood today in one word, what would it be?**

**You seem a little stressed - what's been happening for you?**

**I'm here for you whenever you feel ready.**



## Why conversations with young people can break down

To foster open and meaningful conversations, try to minimise the following common barriers when speaking with a young person:

- interruptions and distractions: these can make young people feel unheard or unimportant.
- jumping in with advice too quickly: focus on listening first, rather than immediately offering solutions.
- judging or dismissing their feelings: validate their perspective, even if you don't fully understand or agree.
- asking too many questions at once: this can feel overwhelming or like an interrogation.
- speaking down to them: communicate with respect and treat them like an equal.

## What to do when a young person doesn't want help

We know young people often resist help, even when they're struggling. Here are some gentle ways to stay connected and be supportive:

- share your own experiences: if your young person isn't ready to talk, showing vulnerability by talking about your own challenges can help build trust and make it easier for them to relate.
- change the conversation: if they're not responding to typical questions about school or work, try asking about their interests, like hobbies, friends or things that bring them joy. These topics can open the door to deeper conversations.
- offer alternatives: let them know they don't have to talk to you if that feels too hard. Suggest other trusted people they could speak with, such as a family member, a counsellor or a mental health professional.

If they're not ready to seek professional support, you can still help by encouraging them to explore coping strategies. There's no single 'right' way to cope. It's important to find strategies that work for them.

Here are some types of coping strategies to consider:

- body-based strategies, such as deep breathing, mindfulness and physical activity
- mind-based strategies, like creative expression (art, music, writing) or healthy escapism (books, games, movies)
- meaning-based strategies, including finding purpose in their experiences, learning about mental health or connecting with others for support.

## When to be concerned about suicide

Young people at risk of suicide may not always openly share how they're feeling, but there are often warning signs to look out for. You might notice changes in their behaviour, mood or routines, or be aware of major life events that could be affecting them.

It's important to check in with them directly. If you're worried, ask calmly and clearly whether they've had thoughts of suicide and whether they have a plan or access to means.

Asking these questions won't put the idea in their head. It shows you care and gives them a chance to talk about what they're going through.

### Signs that young people might be at risk of a suicide attempt

**You need to take urgent action if the young person is:**

- talking about suicide (for example, 'I wish I was dead', 'people would be better off without me')
- expressing hopelessness or despair (in person or online)
- talking or writing frequently about death or dying
- saying goodbye or giving away prized possessions
- visiting known suicide locations
- writing suicide notes or collecting means.

Some young people may not show any signs before a suicide attempt. Asking sensitively and directly about suicidal thoughts can help them feel safe to open up.

If you have immediate concerns for their safety, you should call Triple Zero (000) or take them to the local hospital emergency department.





## How to support a person who self-harms

Discovering that someone is self-harming can be deeply concerning. Responding with calm, compassion and openness is important. Self-harm is often a way of coping with overwhelming emotions, distress or difficult experiences. It does not always mean that a person wants to end their life.

Let the person know that you are there to listen without judgement. Encourage them to talk about how they are feeling and what might be contributing to their distress. While support from family, friends and community members can make a difference, professional support can help the person develop safer coping strategies and address the underlying causes of self-harm.

### Strategies for managing urges to self-harm

When someone is experiencing urges to self-harm, there are practical strategies that may help them manage the urge safely until it becomes less intense. ReachOut notes that urges can feel overwhelming, but they often decrease over time when a person delays self-harm and uses alternative coping strategies.

#### 1. Create a safer environment

Encourage the person to:

- Spend time with other people rather than being alone
- Remove or limit access to items they might use to self-harm
- Avoid places where they are more likely to self-harm when distressed

Creating a safer environment can help reduce immediate risk and provide time for the urge to pass.

#### 2. Delay the urge

Encourage the person to pause before acting on the urge and reach out to someone they trust. If talking to someone is not possible, they can try waiting for 15 minutes before deciding what to do next, then repeat the process if needed. Even a short delay can help reduce the intensity of the urge over time.

#### 3. Use healthy distractions

Different distraction techniques work for different people. Encourage the person to create a personalised list of activities they can turn to when urges arise, such as:

- Going for a walk, run or other form of exercise
- Writing in a journal
- Playing video games
- Listening to music
- Practising slow breathing or relaxation techniques
- Spending time with supportive people
- Allowing themselves space to cry and express emotions safely

The goal of distraction is not to ignore feelings, but to provide time for emotions and urges to become more manageable.

#### **4. Create a self-harm distraction box**

A distraction box can act like a personal self-care kit. It may include comforting or engaging items such as:

- Colouring books or art supplies
- Craft or knitting materials
- Favourite books
- Sensory items with different textures
- Meaningful objects that provide comfort

Having these items readily available can help the person redirect their focus during difficult moments.

#### **5. Seek professional support**

Self-help strategies can help manage urges in the short term, but they do not address the underlying causes of self-harm. Recovery is more likely when a person receives support from a mental health professional who can help them explore their emotions, identify triggers and develop safer coping strategies.

#### **After self-harm**

If someone has self-harmed, encourage them to seek appropriate medical care for any injuries. Medical attention may be needed even when injuries appear minor, to reduce the risk of complications and support recovery.

For further information and self-help resources, visit [ReachOut Australia's self-harm support page](#).



## When should I be worried about my young person's gaming?

For many young people, gaming is a regular part of everyday life. It can be a great way to connect with friends, build skills, solve problems and express creativity. While gaming is a positive experience for most people, there are times when it can start to have a negative impact on other areas of life. Understanding the signs of problematic gaming can help parents, carers and young people recognise when a healthy hobby may be becoming a concern.

Problematic gaming isn't about the number of hours spent playing. It's about the impact gaming is having on a young person's life. Signs can include difficulty stopping, withdrawing from friends and activities, changes in mood, disrupted sleep, or prioritising gaming over other important areas of life. Recognising these signs early can help families have supportive conversations and work together to find a healthier balance.

### Getting support for young people

In WA, we are lucky to have access to the Gaming Disorder Clinic based in Fiona Stanley. The clinic provides specialist support for people experiencing problematic gaming or other unhealthy internet use behaviours. The service offers assessment, treatment, education and practical strategies to help people better understand their gaming habits, identify triggers, build coping skills and improve their overall wellbeing.

Support is available for individuals, families and carers, with a focus on person-centred care and helping people reconnect with education, work, relationships and other meaningful activities

If you want to learn more visit the [Gaming Disorder Clinic](#) webpage or refer a young person email: [FSH.GamingDisorderClinic@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:FSH.GamingDisorderClinic@health.wa.gov.au).

Parents and carers who are concerned about a young person's gaming can access additional information, support and practical resources through [Headspace](#) and [ReachOut](#).



## How to look after yourself

Finding out a young person is struggling with their mental health or experiencing suicidal thoughts can be deeply distressing and is likely to have a significant impact on you.

You're not expected to have all the answers or take on the role of a counsellor. What matters most is that you and the young person get the right support. Reaching out to professionals can make a real difference for both of you.

Here are some counselling and crisis support options available to you in the Perth Metro area:

### Ngala Parenting Line (WA)

**Support for:** parents and carers of children up to 18 years old

**Services:** phone advice, help with immediate parenting concerns and referrals to relevant services

**Contact:** (08) 9368 9368

**Availability:** 7 days a week, 8am – 8pm

### Family Relationship Advice Line

**Support for:** families dealing with relationship or separation issues

**Services:** parenting arrangements after separation, referrals to local services

**Contact:** 1800 050 321

### Beyond Blue

**Support for:** anyone feeling anxious, depressed or needing mental health support

**Services:** online and telephone support

**Contact:** 1300 224 636

**Availability:** 24/7

### My Circle for Parents – Parentline

**Support for:** parents and caregivers

**Services:** online community to share experiences and connect with others

**Access:** visit the [Parentline website](#)

### ReachOut – one-on-one coaching

**Support for:** parents and carers of teens

**Services:** free coaching to help build clarity and confidence in supporting your teen

**Access:** visit the [Reach Out website](#)

### Professional support

You can also make an appointment with a GP, psychologist or counsellor to talk through what's happening and explore support options tailored to your family's needs.



## How to find support for a young person

We understand that supporting your young person's mental health can be challenging.

To help, we've compiled a list of local Perth services that can support both you and your young person during this time.

### Mental health services for young people

For urgent mental health help or advice for children and young people, call Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) Crisis Connect on 1800 048 636, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

#### NMHS Mental Health and Dental Health Services (MHDHS) Youth Mental Health

[MHDHS Youth Mental Health services](#) work collaboratively to provide a range of clinical services to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people across Perth.

Youth Mental Health works closely with Adult Mental Health Services and Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services to provide mental health services to young people with serious mental health disorders.

Youth Mental Health services that cover the Perth Metro are outlined below:

##### Youth Axis

Early intervention service for 16-24 years presenting with ultra-high risk of psychosis and/or features of an emotionally unstable personality disorder. Targets young people who have not had extensive treatment by a specialist mental health service for these presenting problems. The program will support people for up to 6 months.

##### Youth Link

A specialist mental health service providing counselling, therapy and case management to young people aged 13-24 years in the North Metropolitan area with significant mental health problems and barriers to accessing mainstream services. Barriers typically include homelessness and transience, limited support networks, cultural barriers including Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, identity and marginalisation due to diverse sexuality and gender.

##### Youth Reach South

A specialist mental health service providing counselling, therapy and case management to young people aged 13-24 years in the South Metropolitan area with serious mental health problems and barriers to accessing mainstream services.

Barriers typically include homelessness and transience, limited support networks, cultural barriers including Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity and marginalisation due to diverse sexuality and gender.

### **Gender Pathways Service (GPS)**

Provides specialist gender diversity consultation, training, community development, referral information and assessment for suitability and readiness for gender-affirming medical treatment such as hormones and/or surgery.

### **Youth and Adult Complex Attentional Disorders Service (YACADS)**

Provides specialist consultation, assessments, and treatment for individuals with a history of complex attention and hyperactivity symptoms and co-occurring diagnosed mental health conditions.

### **Youth Hospital in the Home (Youth-HITH)**

Provides short term intensive management for up to 14 days in the patient's home or usual place of residence that would otherwise be delivered within a hospital as an admitted inpatient.

### **NMHS Youth Community Assessment and Treatment Team (YCATT)**

YCATT is a specialist community mental health service for young people aged 16 to 24 years experiencing acute, severe, or complex mental health concerns. It provides short-term (up to 12 weeks), trauma-informed assessment, treatment, and care coordination for young people in the NMHS Mental Health catchment area who require intensive multidisciplinary support.

**For more information regarding the referral pathways into NMHS Mental Health and Dental Health Services (MHDHS) visit the [North Metropolitan Health Service website](#).**

## **Community-based youth mental health services**

### **Anglicare Cypress Program (children bereaved by suicide)**

Long-term support service for children and young people between the ages of 6 to 18 who are bereaved by suicide. Support is offered with outreach, counselling, support groups and more.

Contact: 1300 114 446



### **Lifeline DBTeen**

A dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT) informed program delivered in a primary care environment, offering mental well-being skills training for young people aged 14-18.

Young people must be accompanied by an adult.

Criteria: self-harming, emotional dysregulation, low distress tolerance, AOD use.

Contact: [reception@lifelinewa.org.au](mailto:reception@lifelinewa.org.au)

### **Youth Focus**

Counselling for young people aged 12 to 25 that is free of charge, confidential, and doesn't require a formal referral.

Support is available across Western Australia from six offices, via web counselling or within a number of schools and outreach locations.

Self-referrals can be completed on their website or over the phone.

Service Providers can email [duty.officer@youthfocus.com.au](mailto:duty.officer@youthfocus.com.au) or call to speak to their intake team. Self-referrals can be completed on their website or over the phone.

Contact: (08) 6266 4333

### **YFLEX**

YFlex is a free mental health service for young people aged 12 to 25 living in Perth South who are experiencing mental health challenges. Flexible support is available at home, in the community, by phone or online, tailored to individual needs and goals. The team includes mental health professionals, nurses and peer workers and welcomes young people from all backgrounds and identities

Contact: Call 1300 097 991 or email [yflexperth@neaminational.org.au](mailto:yflexperth@neaminational.org.au)

### **Kids Helpline**

Free (even from mobile) 24/7 confidential online and phone counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25.

Qualified counsellors are available via web chat, phone or email anytime and for any reason.

Contact: Visit online at [kidshelpline.com.au](http://kidshelpline.com.au) or call 1800 55 1800

### **Ngatti House**

The house is staffed 24 hours a day with by caring and skilled workers who work with residents to imagine a meaningful future, identify goals they would like to achieve and use their strengths and skills to propel them forward.

Contact: 08 9432 1100

### **MIFWA Support for Young People (EIRP)**

MIFWA's Early Intervention Recovery Program (EIRP) is for young people aged 16 to 30 years who have been diagnosed with mental health challenges, including the first episode of psychosis.

Supports individuals to re-establish or maintain social, professional and educational networks.

Contact: [info@mifwa.org.au](mailto:info@mifwa.org.au) or call 9237 8900

### **Swan City Youth Service**

A walk-in service for young people aged 12 to 25 that is a one-stop-shop, with a variety of programs and support for young people that builds on their individual strengths, and increases confidence and trust, so they can find safety, hope and success.

Provides inhouse informal counselling and general mental health support services during opening hours. There's no waitlist, no appointments, no cost and no cut-off times.

Contact: (08) 9274 3488

### **The Luminous Project**

A non-medical trauma-informed therapeutic self-contained residency stay for a maximum of four nights, during which they will have 24/7 support and supervision (up to five young people at a time). Other than the residents and staff/volunteers, there will be no visitors.

Referrals can be made by anyone including family, or they can refer themselves and get active support and intervention before reaching crisis point.

Contact: (08) 6230 3903

### **headspace**

Provides mental health services to young people aged 12-25.

headspace offers early intervention services, focusing on helping young people address mental health challenges and build skills for long-term wellbeing.

Find your closest centre on the [headspace website](https://www.headspace.org.au).

### **Helping Minds – Youth Counselling**

Offers free, confidential counselling for young people aged 7 to 18, including individual counselling, telehealth counselling for young people aged 15+ in regional and remote WA, and in-school counselling for students aged 7 to 17.

Counselling provides a safe space to talk, build understanding, and develop practical coping strategies.

Find further details on the [Helping Minds website](https://www.helpingminds.org.au).



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## Contact

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[www.neaminational.org.au](http://www.neaminational.org.au)