



# A Guide for Parents – Supporting your child's mental health

Perth Metro SPC  
Updated 2024



## 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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## Content Warning: Suicide Prevention

This document discusses suicide and related topics that may be upsetting for some readers, in particular those who are recently bereaved. If you feel overwhelmed or distressed please seek out a trusted friend for support or call one of the phone lines below.

**In an emergency, do not hesitate to call Triple Zero (000).**



## Contact us

Please contact us for feedback, edits and comments:

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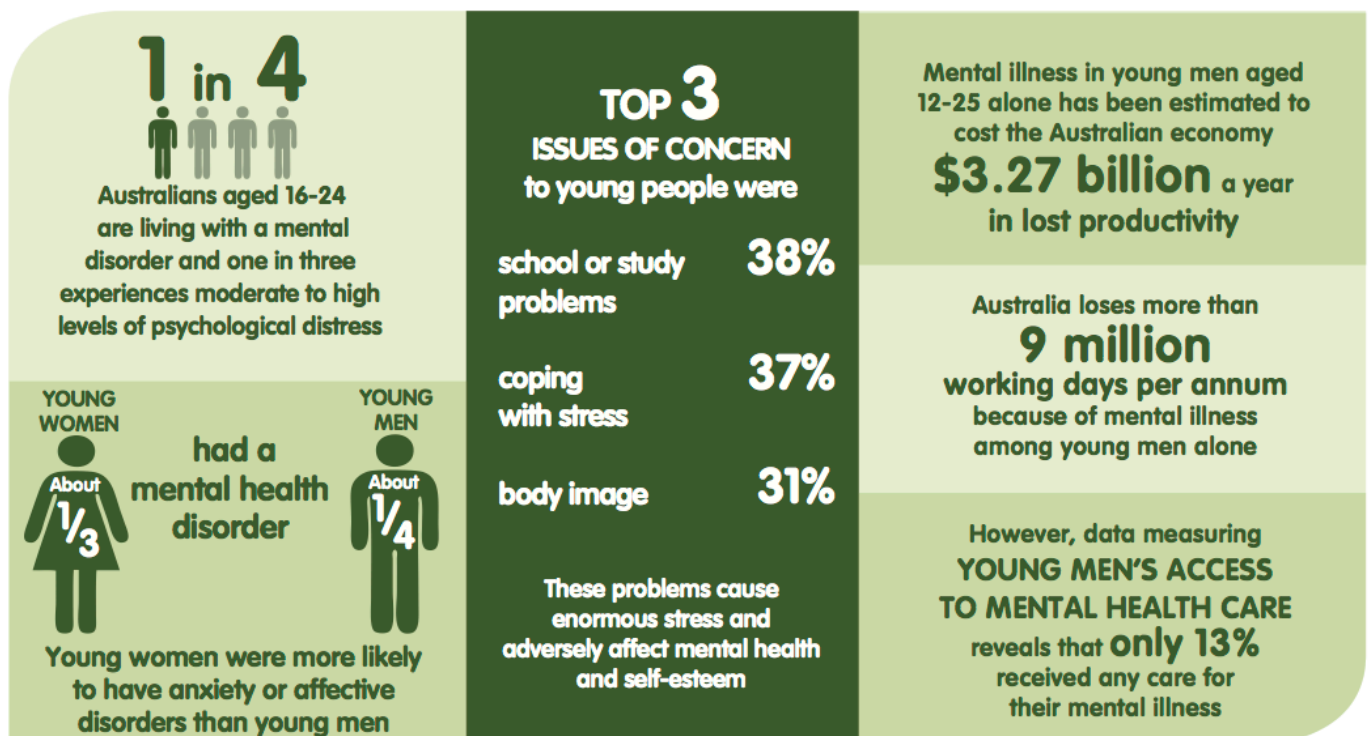
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## This booklet contains information on:

- Youth and mental health
- Important statistics for parents
- When should parents be worried?
- Talking, listening and understanding
- Conversation Starters
- What to do when they don't want help?
- Supports for parents
- What is Self-Harm or Non-Suicidal Self-Injury (NSSI)?
- Mental Health Supports for Young People



Mental Health Commission of NSW, *Youth and young adults*, 2014



## Youth and mental health <sup>1</sup>

Mental health is part of everybody's life. It is as much a part of your overall health as physical health. Being a young person can be tough – there is so much to learn and a lot of changes to deal with, particularly around the transition to independent adulthood. Adolescence is often the time when signs and symptoms of mental illness can start to appear.

While it is normal for young people to feel sad, stressed, angry or anxious at times, when these feelings don't go away and start to have an impact on day-to-day life, this is when extra help and support may be needed. Mental health issues and illness can vary in terms of how it is experienced by a young person and the degree of seriousness.

Everyone's experiences are different. In Australia, one in six young people (16 - 25 years) have anxiety and around one in four young people live with depression. If someone you know shows signs of these conditions, getting help early is important for their recovery.

Prevention and early intervention of the early signs of mental health issues are especially important for children and young people to prevent or reduce the progress of mental illness later in life.

## Important statistics for parents

**Almost one-fifth of all young people aged 11 to 17 years' experience high or very high levels of psychological distress.**

19.9% of all young people (11 to 17 years) had high or very high levels of psychological distress in the previous 12 months, however for females aged 16 to 17 years and young people with major depressive disorder, this was significantly higher (36.2% and 80.7% respectively).

**Young people are less likely than any other age group to seek professional help.**

Only 31% of young women and 13% of young men with mental health problems had sought any professional help.

**One in ten young people aged 12-17 years old will self-harm, one in 13 will seriously consider a suicide attempt, and one in 40 will attempt suicide.**

6.9% of children and young people (aged 4 to 17 years) had suffered from an anxiety disorder in the past 12 months.

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<sup>1</sup> Mental Health Commission WA. *Youth and mental health*. <https://www.mhc.wa.gov.au/your-health-and-wellbeing/youth/>

<sup>2</sup> Statistics - Beyond Blue: Children/Youth <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/media/statistics>

## When should I be worried?

**As a parent, it might be difficult to tell the difference between warning signs and normal ups and downs for your child.**

These quick questions can give you an indication of how worried you need to be:

- ✓ 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)?

The more times you answered 'yes' to these questions, the more you should consider discussing these behavioural changes with your a health professional.

## When to be worried about suicide

While people at risk of suicide may try to hide how they are feeling, there will often be warning signs. You might notice changes in their behaviour or be aware of major events in their life that could be affecting them. It is important to ask directly to find out if they have the means or plans of how they are going to end their life.

**Some signs to look for include:**

TALK	BEHAVIOUR	MOOD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Talking about suicide or wanting to die</li><li>• Talking about being a burden to others</li><li>• Talking about feeling trapped or having unbearable pain</li><li>• Sounding hopeless for the future "I'd like to go to sleep and never wake up"</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Agitation, anxiety and/or irritability</li><li>• Taking dangerous risks</li><li>• Trouble sleeping</li><li>• Changes in appearance</li><li>• Absences or withdrawal from activities</li><li>• A recent stressful event or loss</li><li>• Increased drug or alcohol use</li><li>• Giving away possessions or saying goodbye</li><li>• Self-harming</li><li>• Previous suicide attempt/s</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Feeling tired, anxious, empty, hopeless, or trapped</li><li>• Social withdrawal/feeling alienated.</li><li>• Seeming preoccupied with an internal thought or problem.</li><li>• Dramatic changes in mood including being suddenly happy</li></ul>

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

## Talking, listening and understanding

- Be an attentive listener.
- Sit in a relaxed position and use appropriate eye contact.
- Ask open ended questions.
- Acknowledge their feelings and be careful not to offer advice too quickly.
- Don't be afraid to ask about how they are feeling and to talk about what is going on.
- Let the young person know if you've noticed a change in their behaviour and appearance.
- They may not want to talk, but your interest shows them that you are willing to talk about their mental health.
- Ask questions – but not too many!
- If the young person doesn't want to talk to you about what's going on don't take it personally. Let them know you are ready to listen whenever they want to talk.
- If you are not sure what to say, do a little research. Read more about anxiety or depression so that you feel more comfortable talking about it.
- Talking is not always what the young person feels like doing. Consider sending a supportive message via text, Facebook or other social messaging services, or perhaps just write a note.

### Be understanding

- Read up on anxiety and depression. The more you know the better equipped you will be to help the young person.
- Be sure not to suggest that they just 'Cheer up' or 'Pull yourself together'.
- Encourage the young person to learn more about anxiety and depression and provide some useful website links.

### Be helpful

- Encourage them to get help.
- Reassure them that help is available.
- Ask how you can help. Young people will want support at different times in different ways.

## Conversation Starters:



*"Questions to ask your child" by YoungMindsUK*

For concerns around mental health, you can also try the below:

- Start with "I noticed..." and explain what you've observed that made you concerned.
- 'How are you on a scale of 1 to 10?' (1 = pretty awful and 10 = awesome)
- Listen to them first.
- Acknowledge what they're going through.
- Support them in taking action.
- Refer them to a professional.

**Know that it's ok not to have all the answers: just listen, be patient, show them you care and help them find support.**

**Note: If you have concerns of thoughts of suicide, asking about it is the best thing you can do as it gives them an opportunity to be honest and you can support them to access support. You are not putting the idea into their head by asking.**

## What to do when they don't want help?

If your teen doesn't want to talk about what's going on in their life, it can be helpful to show your own vulnerability and share with them what's going on in your life.

If your teen doesn't seem interested in responding to the usual questions, try asking them about things other than school and work. Young people love to talk about their passions and their friends, and about other things that give them joy.

Offer some options of other people they could talk to, such as another family member, a counsellor or a mental health professional.

If they are not interested in professional support, support them to explore their coping strategies. There's no 'one size fits all' to cope. It's important to find the best strategies for them as a person and their life.

- [Body strategies](#), such as breathing, mindfulness and exercise.
- [Mind strategies](#), such as creative expression and escapism.
- [Other coping strategies](#), such as finding meaning/purpose in mental illnesses and getting support.

## Barriers to effective communication

Try to minimise the following, which act as barriers to effective communication.

- Interruptions and distractions, which can make it seem like you're not interested in what your child is saying.
- Jumping in with advice, rather than listening to what your child has to say.
- Judging what your child has to say and not validating their point of view.
- Interrogating your child by firing questions at them.
- Talk to them like an adult. Mutual respect is very important to teens and young adults.



## Hearing that your child is having suicidal thoughts is distressing and it's likely to have a big impact on you.

You're not expected to be their counsellor or to know exactly what to do. Reaching out for professional support is important for your wellbeing and the wellbeing of your child.

Here are some more counselling and crisis support options:

Service		Contact
<b>Ngala Parenting Line WA</b>	Phone advice and support to parents and carers of children up to 18. Provide timely response to immediate parenting concerns and connects parents and carers to relevant services and resources.	(08) 9368 9368 or 1800 111 546 (free for STD) Open 7 days a week, 8am - 8pm
<b>Family Relationship Advice Line</b>	Help for families affected by relationship or separation issues, including information on parenting arrangements after separation. It can also refer callers to local services.	1800 050 321
<b>beyondblue</b>	Online and telephone support for anyone feeling anxious or depressed	1300 224 636 24/7
<b>My Circle for Parents - Parentline</b>	Online community to connect with other parents and caregivers about the highs, lows and laughs of parenting.	Find online or through this <a href="#">link</a>
<b>One on One Coaching - ReachOut</b>	A free coaching service for parents and carers. Create clarity and increase confidence to support your teen through a tough time.	Find online or through this <a href="#">link</a>
Make an appointment to see a GP, psychologist or counsellor		

# What is Self-Harm or Non-Suicidal Self-Injury (NSSI)?

Self-Harm is deliberately causing pain or damage to your own body and can be suicidal or non-suicidal in intent. Non-Suicidal Self-Injury (NSSI) is a type of self-harm and refers to deliberately causing pain or damage to your own body without suicidal intent.<sup>1</sup>

**Thoughts of non-suicidal self-injury are common among young people in Australia and increase during the adolescent years. The Growing up in Australia: Longitudinal Study of Australian Children found that one in three respondents had considered non-suicidal self-injury between the ages of 14 and 17, while 18% reported acts of self-injury.<sup>2</sup>**

In general people self-harm as a way of coping. People often talk about harming themselves to relieve, control or express distressing feelings, thoughts or memories. People who repeatedly self-harm may also experience thoughts of suicide.

Acts of self-harm should always be taken seriously as they can be physically dangerous and suggest an underlying mental health issue that needs professional support.

## How do I help someone who self-harms?

People who self-harm may be secretive or feel ashamed about their behaviour. It helps to talk calmly and without judgment about your concerns for them. Encourage the person to discuss their issue with a GP or other health professional. Treating the underlying causes has been shown to make a long-term difference to reducing and removing the impulse to self-harm and you can tell the person that there are ways that expert help can reduce their desire to self-harm.

1. Self-harm and self-injury, Department of Health & Human Services: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/self-harm>
2. Self-injury among adolescents: *Growing Up in Australia* Snapshot Series is available at: <http://www3.aifs.gov.au/institute/media/docs/tGxliJ48sMY/LSAC-Snapshot-4-Self-injury.pdf>

**“Be curious. If you remember to be curious when speaking to a loved one, you will avoid coming across as judgemental. Focus on asking about their feelings instead of the self-harm itself. They will feel more understood if you connect with and acknowledge their emotions.” - Lifeline**

## Short Term strategies for managing urges to self-harm

If a young person is struggling with self-harm, it can be challenging to find effective and immediate ways to manage the urge to hurt themselves. Here are some practical strategies and techniques that Lifeline recommend helping young people feel more in control, and to manage their emotions in the moment.

### **Distraction:**

It might seem counterintuitive, but distraction can help prevent self-harming behaviours. We recognize that the urge to self-harm is often fleeting. If a young person can resist the initial impulse, the desire may fade relatively quickly.

Distraction could include engaging in a positive activity; like taking a walk, listening to music, or chatting with a friend. Challenge yourself to wait for 10 minutes and observe if the urge subsides. If it persists, extend the waiting period by another 10 minutes.

### **Use a safer alternative:**

If a young person feels the urge to self-harm, they can try using a safer alternative, which can still help divert strong emotional feelings into physical sensations.

- Holding ice cubes
- Using a red marker to draw on your skin
- Having a freezing cold shower
- Squeezing a stress ball or soft toy
- Eat something with a strong taste such as chilli or vegemite
- Clap your hands vigorously or beat your fists into a pillow.

If a young person finds it hard to remember distraction or safer alternatives, support them to write it down or save into their phone so they can access when needed. It's important to encourage them to seek professional help & help support them to find resources.

**Remember, if a young person has recently self-harmed, seek prompt medical care. Some injuries can lead to infections and more severe consequences if left untreated.**

For more information, please check out the LifeLife Self-Harm toolkit:  
<https://toolkit.lifeline.org.au/topics/self-harm/what-is-self-harm>

# Mental Health Services for young people

The WA Mental Health Commission (WA MHC) defines youth as aged 16 to 24.

For urgent mental health help or advice for children and young people, call [CAMHS Crisis Connect](#) on [1800 048 636](#), 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

## Youth Mental Health

An integrated triage and entry process exists between Youth Axis, YouthLink and YouthReach South. Contact the YMH Triage Officer for initial referral,

**How:** Referrals/Triage (ph) 1300 362 569 (Email) referral form [youthmhtriage@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:youthmhtriage@health.wa.gov.au) or (Fax) referral form to (08) 9287 5762

**When:** Monday to Friday, 8:30am – 4:30pm

## 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 ATSI 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 Axis 1 or Axis 2 diagnosed mental health conditions.

For more details visit [NMHS Youth Mental Health webpage](#)

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

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

### **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. Must be accompanied by an adult. Criteria: Self-harming, emotional dysregulation, low distress tolerance, AOD use.

**How:** contact to go on the waitlist for the next available program  
[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, doesn't require a formal referral and is available across Western Australia from six offices, via web counselling or within a number of schools and outreach locations.

**How:** 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.

**(PH)** (08) 6266 4333

### **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 WebChat, Phone or Email anytime and for any reason.

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

### **Ngatti House**

The house is staff 24 hours a day with 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.

**(PH):** 08 9432 1100 **Address:** 5 – 9 Alma Street, Fremantle WA 6160

### **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 you 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 12-25, that is a one-stop-shop, with a variety of programs and support for young people that builds on your individual strengths, increases confidence and trust, so you 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.

**Where:** 12 Padbury Terrace, Midland. Open 10am - 6pm, Monday to Friday

**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 by anyone including family, or they can refer themselves and get active support and intervention before reaching crisis point. Call (08) 6230 3903 between 9am-5pm.

**Where:** Address provided once accepted.

**Who:** 16 to 24, experiencing suicidal thoughts, from WA

## More information

For feedback/comments please contact the Neami Suicide Prevention Coordinators:

### Neami National Perth

Ground Floor, 9 Kitchener Avenue, Burswood WA 6100

Proudly working on the traditional lands of the Whadjuk people

Email: [spc.metro@neaminational.org.au](mailto:spc.metro@neaminational.org.au)

**This service is not a crisis response service. If you require crisis support,  
please call 000 or Lifeline 13 11 14.**



We acknowledge Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities as the Traditional Custodians of the land we work on and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We recognise that their sovereignty was never ceded.

Neami celebrates, values and includes people of all backgrounds, genders, sexualities, cultures, bodies and abilities.