

# Supporting young people's mental health

## A Guide for Parents & Carers

Perth Metro Suicide Prevention Coordination  
Updated 2025



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



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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<sup>1</sup>. 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.



<sup>1</sup>Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing, 2020–2022*. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/mental-health/national-study-mental-health-and-wellbeing/latest-release>



## 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.<sup>2</sup>
- 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.<sup>3</sup>
- 38.8% of people aged 16 - 24 years had a 12-month mental disorder<sup>3</sup>
- 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.<sup>3</sup>
- Suicide is the leading cause of death among young Australians, with mental health conditions a common risk factor for young people.<sup>4</sup>



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Suicide is the leading cause of death among young Australians, with mental health conditions a common risk factor for young people

<sup>2</sup>Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2023). National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing, 2020–2022: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/mental-health/national-study-mental-health-and-wellbeing/latest-release>

<sup>3</sup>ABS (2023b) 'Estimated resident population, country of birth, age and sex – as at 30 June 1996 to 2022'- <https://dataexplorer.abs.gov.au>

<sup>4</sup>'Deaths in Australia', 11 Jul 2023, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Deaths in Australia, Leading causes of death – [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](https://www.aihw.gov.au)

# 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<sup>5</sup>
- 2 in 5 young people say they prefer to deal with mental health challenges on their own<sup>5</sup>

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.

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<sup>5</sup> **headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation. (2023).** Young people encouraged to 'ditch the expectations' as survey reveals stigma still a barrier to seeking help. <https://headspace.org.au/our-organisation/media-releases/young-people-encouraged-to-ditch-the-expectations-as-survey-reveals-stigma-still-a-barrier-to-seeking-help/>



# How to start supportive conversations with a young person about mental health<sup>6,7</sup>

## 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.

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<sup>6</sup> headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation. (2021). Real Talk Framework: A conversational approach to supporting mental health and wellbeing in Australian universities.

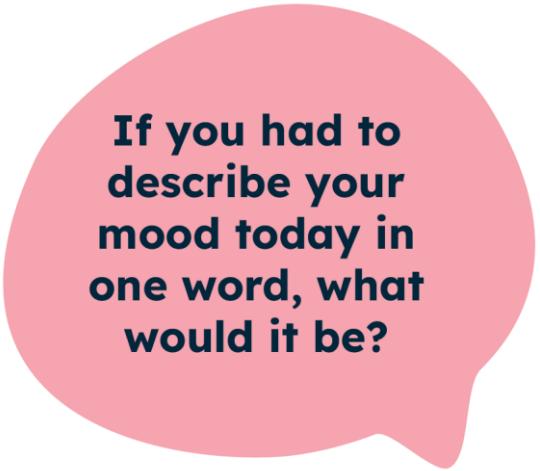
<https://headspace.org.au/assets/211029-Real-Talk-Framework-1.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Mind. Managing conversations around mental health. [https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/4842/blp-managing-conversations-around-mental-health\\_v2.pdf](https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/4842/blp-managing-conversations-around-mental-health_v2.pdf)

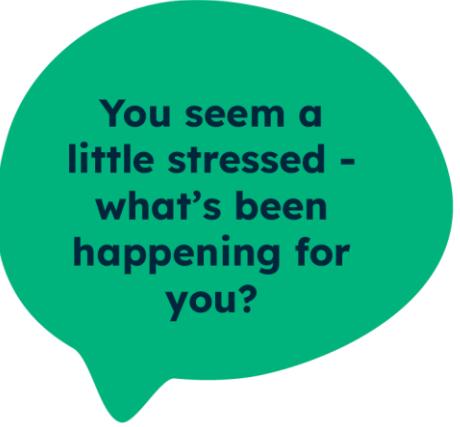
## Conversation starters

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.<sup>8</sup>

- '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.**

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<sup>8</sup> headspace. (2024). *How to start the conversation about mental health*. Headspace Australia. <https://headspace.org.au/explore-topics/supporting-a-young-person/how-to-start-the-conversation-about-mental-health>



## 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<sup>9,10</sup>.

## Signs that young people might be at risk of a suicide attempt<sup>11</sup>

**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.

<sup>9</sup> **Headspace.** *Starting a conversation with a young person.* Headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation. Retrieved from [https://headspace.org.au/assets/Factsheets/headspace\\_conversation-with-young-person\\_Fact-Sheet\\_FA01\\_DIGI-2.pdf](https://headspace.org.au/assets/Factsheets/headspace_conversation-with-young-person_Fact-Sheet_FA01_DIGI-2.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> **Beyond Blue.** *Youth mental health.* Beyond Blue. Retrieved from <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/mental-health/youth>

<sup>11</sup> Raising Children Network. (n.d.). Suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts in teenagers. Retrieved from <https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/mental-health-physical-health/mental-health-disorders-concerns/suicidal-thoughts>



# How to support a young person who self-harms

Discovering a young person is self-harming can be distressing, but responding with calm, compassion and openness is key.

Self-harm is often a way for young people to cope with overwhelming emotions, not necessarily a sign they want to end their life.

Let them know you're there for them without judgement and gently encourage them to talk about what they're feeling. Seeking support from a GP, counsellor or mental health service can help them learn safer ways to manage distress<sup>12</sup>.

## Understanding self-harm and non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI)

Self-harm involves deliberately causing pain or injury to one's own body and can occur with or without suicidal intent.

Non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) refers specifically to self-harm without the intention to die. It's often used as a way to cope with emotional distress or express difficult feelings.

NSSI is relatively common among Australian adolescents. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), adolescents aged 13–18 are 3.4 times more likely than adults to be hospitalised due to self-harm.

In 2021–22, over 6,300 young people were hospitalised for intentional self-harm injuries, with four in five of these cases involving girls<sup>13</sup>.

While NSSI is not a suicide attempt, it should always be taken seriously. It can be physically dangerous and may signal underlying mental health concerns.

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

When a young person is struggling with self-harm, it can be difficult to know how to help them manage the urge in the moment. These practical strategies recommended by Lifeline can help them feel more in control and reduce the risk of harm.

### 1. Distraction techniques

The urge to self-harm is often intense but short-lived. Distraction can help delay the impulse until it passes. Encourage them to:

- go for a walk
- listen to music
- call or message a friend
- try the '10-minute rule': wait 10 minutes and see if the urge fades. If not, wait another 10.

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<sup>12</sup> Headspace. Self harm – What you need to know. Retrieved from <https://headspace.org.au/explore-topics/for-young-people/self-harm>

<sup>13</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2024). Injuries in children and adolescents 2021–22: Adolescence (13–18). Retrieved from <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/injury/injuries-in-children-and-adolescents-2021-22/contents/injuries-by-developmental-stage/adolescence-13-18>

## 2. Safer alternatives

If the urge remains strong, some safer physical alternatives can help release emotional tension:

- hold ice cubes
- draw on skin with a red marker
- take a cold shower
- squeeze a stress ball or soft toy
- eat something with a strong taste (e.g. chilli or Vegemite)
- clap hands or punch a pillow

Encourage them to save these ideas in their phone or write them down so they're easy to access when needed.

## 3. Seek support

These strategies are short-term tools, not long-term solutions. It's important to support the young person to seek professional help to address the underlying emotional distress.

## 4. After self-harm

If a young person has recently self-harmed, seek medical attention promptly. Even minor injuries can lead to infection or complications if untreated.

For more information, please check out the [Lifeline self-harm toolkit](#).





## 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.

**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

### **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](#).





## Contact

### **Perth Metro Suicide Prevention Coordination**

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