

Rethink
Mental
Illness.



Questions about
mental health?



www.rethink.org/youngpeople

Finding out about mental health

We've prepared these resources with the support of a group of young people who have experience of mental health problems. We hope you find them useful. They are a mixture of things to read and think about, and activities which you can download and keep. These resources are not a substitute for professional help – and our key piece of advice throughout is to talk about how you're feeling and ask for help.

What is mental health and mental illness?

A short general overview of the meaning of mental health and mental illness (also called mental health problems) and the difference between them, and a chance to start thinking about how you are feeling.

Looking after my mental health

Here, we talk about the sorts of things which can affect how we feel emotionally, how to work out whether we need help, and what sort of things we can do to look after our mental health.

Looking after my mental health – doing it my way

A poster which can be downloaded or printed off and completed – a chance to put down on paper your own thoughts and feelings about the sorts of things which make you feel better.

Talking about my mental health

Information and activities to develop your ability to talk about how you are feeling or any worries you have, and how to identify who you want to talk to.

Finding out more about mental health and illness

Websites and apps which provide a range of information or support about many aspects of mental health.

Myth busters – what's the truth about mental health?

We asked young people some of the things they've heard about mental health, and here we correct many of the myths that exist.

A downloadable poster is available on our website for you to fill. You'll find it at **www.rethink.org/feelings**.

What is mental health and mental illness?

Mental health is something we all have, and it's something that changes at different times in our lives. We all have a body and we all have a brain, so we all have physical health and mental health. Some people think of their mental health as 'emotional health' or 'wellbeing'.

We all experience emotions such as being excited or happy – these are examples of positive mental health. At other times, we also have things we struggle with, and can feel down, anxious, worried or stressed – these emotions are all part of our mental health.

It's important that we have ways to look after ourselves and that we know what support is available when things feel difficult. Have a look at **'Looking after my mental health'** for lots more information on this and suggestions on what helps.

At certain times we feel emotionally better than at others and lots of us talk about feeling depressed, stressed out or down or low.

Sometimes we feel like this for no obvious reason, and sometimes there are things happening which affect our moods, for a short time. All of these are part of mental health, and all of these are common and natural.

Recognising that our feelings change at different times is important. It's something we all share, even though it can feel very unsettling whilst it's happening.

Being able to talk about how we feel helps. Having these kinds of experiences doesn't necessarily mean we have a mental illness, and doesn't mean we will get one in the future.



What is mental illness?

Mental illnesses (can also be called mental health problems) are natural, and some people will get these during their lives, just like some people will break their leg, or get flu or cancer.

Most people recover from mental illness, and help is out there. Mental illness can affect the ways we feel, act and think. There are many different types of mental illnesses, and some may be more familiar than others. Some that you may have heard of include:

- Stress and anxiety disorders
- Having depression
- Eating disorders
- Psychosis
- Self-harm

If you feel like you need someone to talk to, please go to **‘Talking about my mental health’** which has ideas for who to talk to and how to get ready to chat.

It can be very difficult if you think you, or a family member or friend might have [mental health problems or a mental illness, and having people to share this with will help. Try not to keep things to yourself.

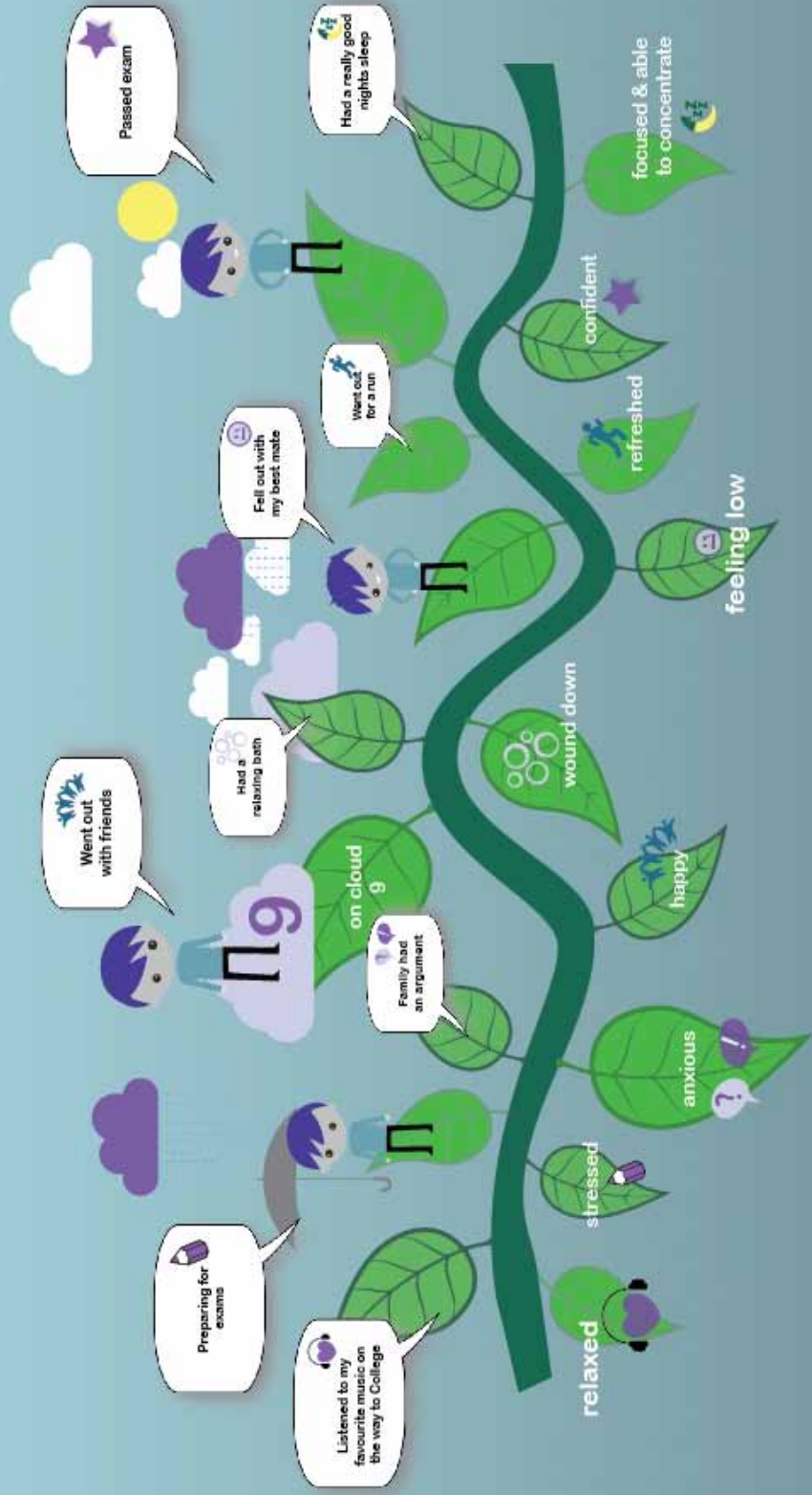
The idea of talking about mental health can seem scary, but it’s a natural part of us. Talking to other people can make us realise it’s not unusual, and we’re not alone.

Mental health problems and mental illnesses can be caused by a range of factors, and no one is to blame for it, any more than if we get chicken pox.

Have a look at **‘Looking after my mental health’** for some more information and **‘Finding out more about mental health and illness’** for where to find support.

A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF

'We all have mental health which is constantly affected by life events. There are lots of things we can do to enjoy the good times and to help us get through more difficult times.'





Activity

What sorts of things worry me about my mental health?

What would help me feel better?

Now look at **'Talking about my mental health'** for some suggestions and next steps.

Key messages

- All sorts of things can have an effect on our mental health.
- Mental illnesses happen, and are as natural as physical illnesses.
- Help is out there. Tell someone you trust if you are worried about your mental health.

"I normally find someone I'm comfortable talking to, and just unleash a load of vocabulary that doesn't always make sense.

And it's so helpful, it doesn't have to make sense, as long as how I feel is expressed in a healthy way, it's all that matters".



Looking after my mental health

All of us feel up and down emotionally at different times, and we're affected by a wide range of factors. We all have different things which can help.

What can affect my mental health?

We don't always know what affects our mental health or what might cause a mental illness (also known as mental health problem), and that can be frightening. Talking about it to a trusted adult and asking for help as soon as possible is key.

Things which sometimes cause us mental health problems can include:

- Bereavement
- Using alcohol and substances
- Genetic factors
- Physical illnesses
- Worrying about the future
- Hormones
- Abuse
- Overuse and misuse of the internet

(sometimes people worry that if someone in their family experiences mental health problems, they will too. This isn't the case, and it doesn't necessarily mean you will)

- School or exam pressures, college or work environments
- Childhood experiences
- Friendships and relationships; sex and sexuality

(don't feel peer-pressure around social networking. It can sometimes be tempting to share our thoughts and feelings about personal events going on in our lives but this isn't always the most helpful way of dealing with our problems. Remember social media is very public and you might not want a reminder of that moment in the future.)

All of us can feel differently on different days, and some things make us feel sad or happy. The ups and downs of life are perfectly natural, but sometimes our general mental health is affected.

Just like we need to look after our body, we need to take care of our mind, too, and sometimes need to look at what's bothering us, and do things differently. We all need to look after our mental health all the time and not just if we feel bad.

Mood changes are perfectly common, especially in the teenage years where hormones have an impact, and we have a lot going on from exams to first relationships, to changing friendships and school, college and work environments. It can be a difficult time.

Trust your instincts. If you feel you'd like to talk over how you're feeling, then it's definitely a good idea to do that.

A good place to start is a responsible adult in your life, but it's also important to think about talking to your GP, as it's possible to get a referral from them to the Child and Adolescents' Mental Health Service (CAHMS), or Early Intervention (EI) Teams, who can offer specialist support.

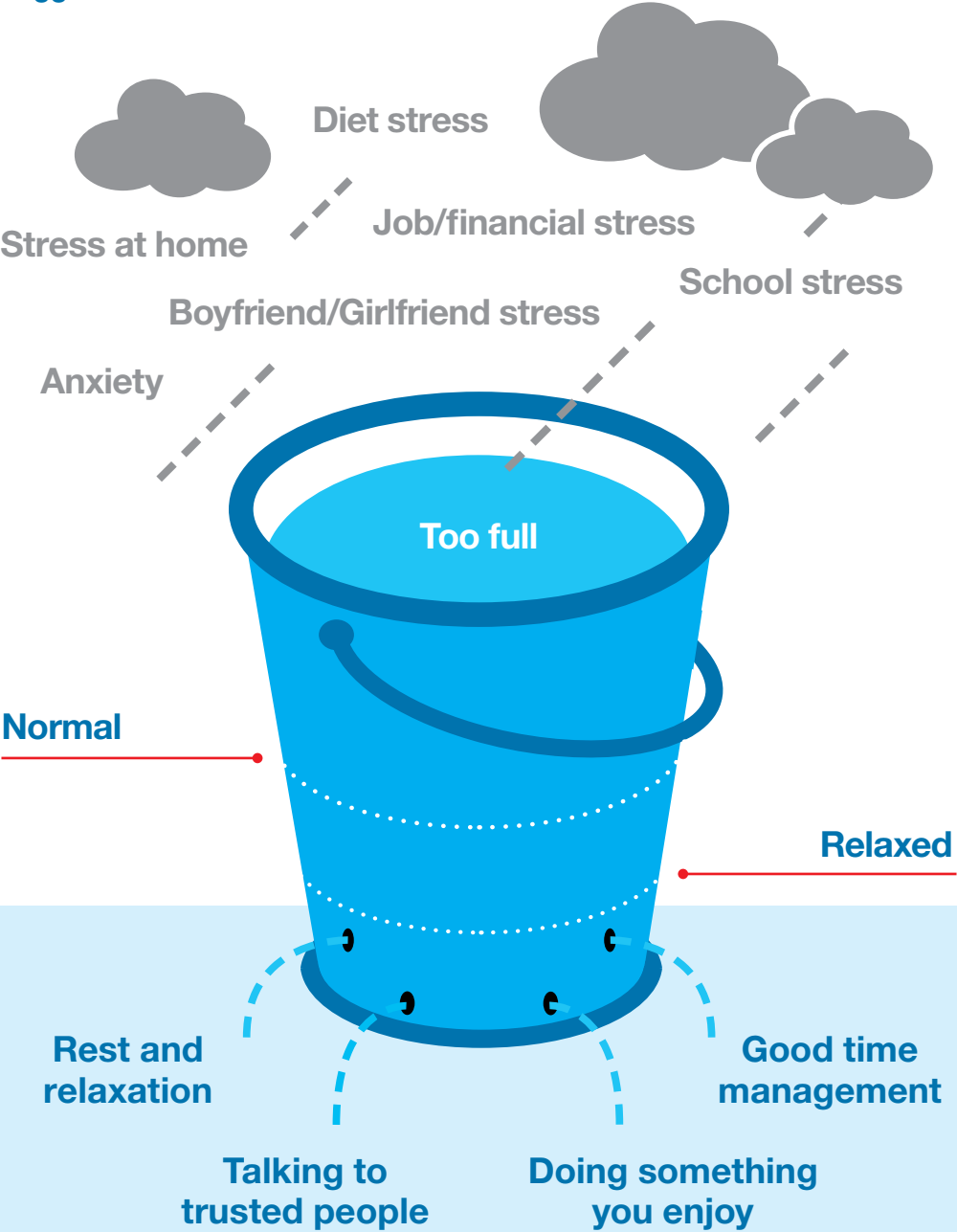
If you're not sure whether or not you need some support, do talk to a trusted adult, and you might also want to consider asking yourself the following questions.

Over the past two weeks:

- has your ability to do day-to-day things been affected?
- have you taken less joy from things you usually like doing, such as seeing friends or sport or other activities?
- have you had trouble eating or sleeping well?

If you feel like any of these sound a bit like you, we'd definitely recommend asking for help and telling someone how you are feeling. There could be lots of reasons why you are feeling that way, but it is best to ask for help early and talk about how you're feeling. Don't struggle alone.

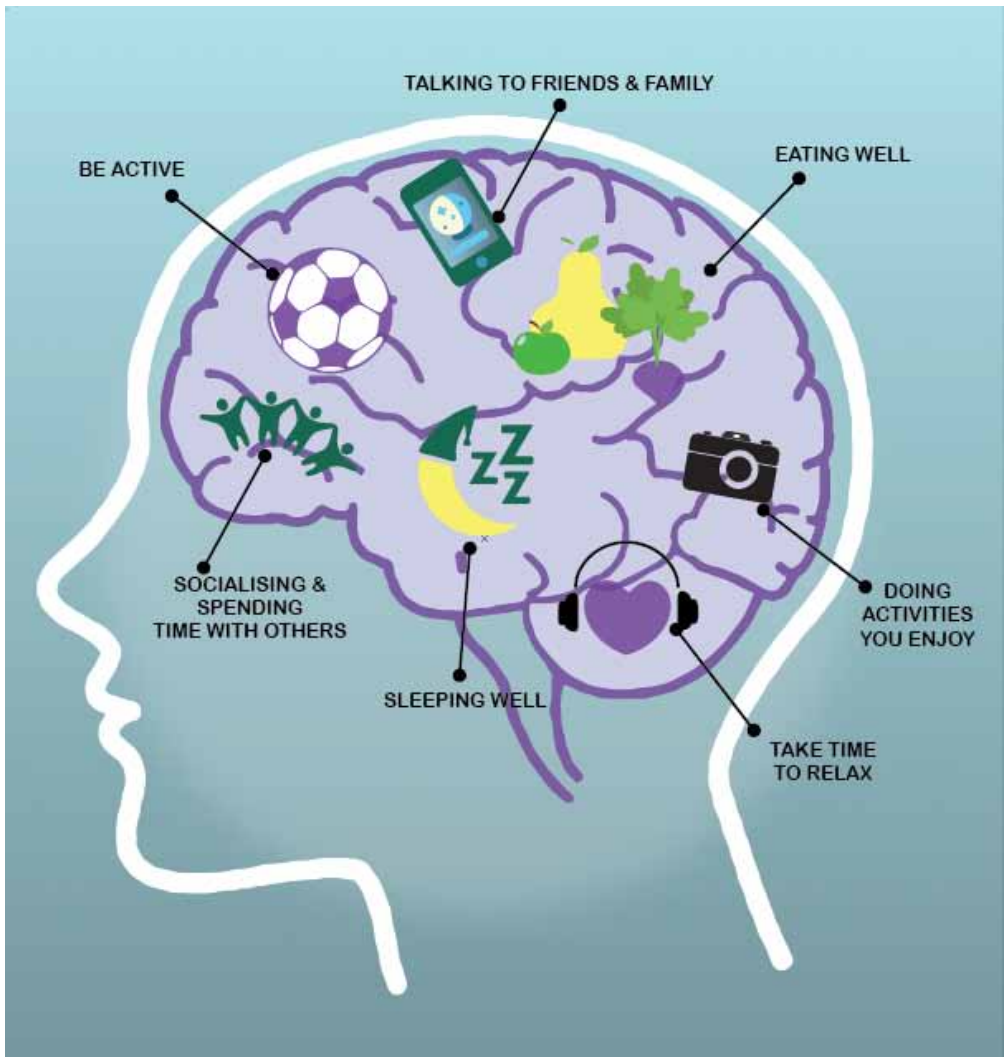
Our ability to deal with life's stresses is known as our 'resilience'. Sometimes we face more difficult experiences than usual and this can affect how we think and feel. Take a look at the diagram below to see why its really important that we look after ourselves, and some suggestions for how we can do this.



How can I look after my mental health?

There are lots of things we can all do to keep ourselves emotionally healthy, and it's really important that we look after ourselves and maintain positive wellbeing. This can help us to feel more confident to enjoy life and deal with more difficult times. We all have different ways of doing this and it's important to identify our own unique needs and what works best for you.

Our diagram of the brain shows some of the things which can help:



Top Tips recommended by young people we spoke to:

1. Remember that you're not alone, and that it helps to talk to people about our feelings, so talk to friends and family, or seek some help from outside (like a GP or teacher) – sometimes it's easier to talk to people we don't know.
2. Take time out from technology – limit social networking and internet and phone use – have time away from the screen.
3. Go for a walk – we can benefit from this by looking after our physical health, as well as providing a bit of space from how busy our lives can be.
4. Listen to music – putting on some favourite music can help provide the 'feel good factor'.
5. Treat feeling mentally unwell the same way as you'd treat a physical illness – don't be hard on yourself about it – it's not your fault.



Activity: What helps me feel better?

Key messages

- No one is to blame for having a mental illness, and they have lots of different causes. Don't be hard on yourself.
- Doing things we enjoy is an important part of feeling better – these are different for everyone.
- Asking for help is the most important step towards getting better. Don't worry whether the words are 'right', just speak as freely as you can.

This poster is a chance to put down on paper your own thoughts and feelings. Feel free to print it out and complete.

LOOKING AFTER MYSELF...

How do I like
to relax?



How much sleep
& rest would be
helpful for me?

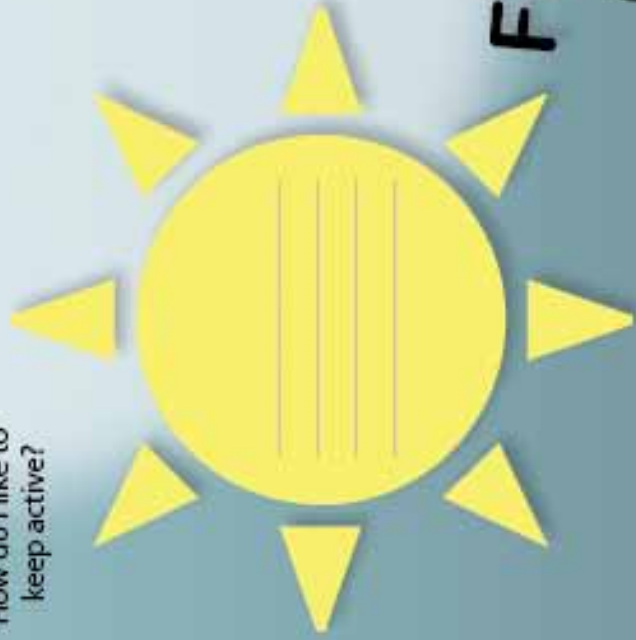


Who do I like to talk
to & spend time with?



I LIKE...

How do I like to
keep active?



What kind of food
can I eat that will
make me feel good?



**FEELING
GOOD**

**Rethink
Mental
Illness.**



**CITY
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Illustration by Lucy Barker.

Talking about my mental health

Around three young people in any class will have mental health problems. Mental health problems are no one's fault – they are actually very common. It's important that we all feel confident to talk much more freely about our mental health.

Everyone will have their own way of communicating their thoughts and feelings, and this can be different depending on who we're talking to. Mental health problems are much more easily helped if we talk about them like we would do about our physical health – if we had a broken leg we'd talk about it.

We see more people with mental health problems in films and television dramas now, and so we're growing more aware. The Time to Change campaign has a lot of famous people talking about their own experiences of mental health, and this helps to break down stigma and discrimination which has sometimes prevented people from talking about their experiences in the past. Have a look at <http://www.time-to-change.org.uk/> for more information.

There's no right or wrong way to talk about our mental health. In different languages, there are different words, or sometimes no words to express mental health, but it is important that we all talk much more freely about it.

If you're worried about your own mental health, or someone you care about, there is lots of support and help available. Young people who have experienced mental health problems themselves say the most important thing they did in their recovery was talking to other people and sharing how they felt. It helped them to realise they weren't alone, and that there are lots of sources of help out there.

For more information, check out **'Looking after my mental health'** and **'Finding out more about mental health and illness'**.



Activity: Preparing to talk

It can be difficult to know who to talk to and what to say, and so it's worth giving it some thought. It is important to talk about mental health problems, just as we would if we had problems with our physical health. Getting help early is really beneficial. If the first person you speak to doesn't understand, don't give up, talk to someone else.

Sometimes we get early warning signs of not feeling emotionally well – these are different for everyone, but recognising our own, means we can ask for help early, and gives us a starting point for what to say.

A few examples are:

- Not sleeping well
- Feeling more irritable or 'snappy' than usual
- Having some physical symptoms like tiredness or aches and pains that a physical cause can't explain
- Finding it hard to concentrate.

You're not alone. Young people who have experienced their own mental health difficulties said:

"Talk to a professional – they have heard it before lots of times and will not be shocked. They can give good advice or refer you to a specialist".

"Be patient with yourself. Take your time".

"Write it down. Get it off your chest. Bottling things up does not help".

"Surely you'd want a friend to tell you if they were struggling – your friends will feel the same way about you".

"When talking to a professional it's different. Because I don't have a personal relationship with them, I feel I don't need to protect them from the horrible details".

Do you have any ‘early warning signs’?

What happens?	What can I do?	Who can I talk to?

If you decide to talk to a professional such as a nurse or GP, you can plan what you want to say, and use different tools to help explain to them how you feel. You could:

- Keep a diary about how you’re feeling for a little while – you could take this to an appointment.
- Write down the key things you want to say and take it with you, or print off this resource and complete it to take with you.
- Think about whether you want to take someone with you, and whether you want them to speak on your behalf.

Who could I talk to?

Tick the box if you think you could share how you feel with any of these people	
Close family member	
Teacher	
School nurse/support staff (e.g. learning mentor)	
Doctor	
Youth worker	
Trusted friend	
Put the names of other people you could talk to below:	



Activity: Working out how I feel

Don't worry if you can't find whole sentences, or can't complete them all – just fill in the ones you want, or add just a few words into the speech bubbles at the end.

What's worrying me about how I'm feeling:

How do I behave when I feel this way?

What things make me feel this way?

What are my worries about talking to other people?

How could talking about it help?

What do I want to say?

What advice would I give to someone feeling the way I do now?

What words describe my feelings?



**Key
messages**

- Asking for help as early as possible is the best thing to do.
- Don't worry about not knowing the 'right' words; just express how you feel.
- Think about talking to professionals as well as family or friends.
- Write down what you want to say and take it with you.
- If the first person you speak to doesn't understand, don't give up, try someone else.

Finding out more about mental health and illness

The websites below are provided by young people who have found them helpful. We've put them in alphabetical order, and they cover a range of mental health related issues. Keep a note or bookmark the ones you like. Add any other ones you've found at the end of this page.

Whilst there are some really useful websites out there providing information, advice and support, it's really important to use reliable websites that provide accurate information. Unfortunately, it is easy to stumble across websites that do not support recovery, and might not be very helpful.

Be selective about using the internet. We recommend being cautious about putting information on social networking sites, particularly around our thoughts and feelings – remember, this information will stay there forever.

www.addaction.org.uk	Provides information about drug and alcohol problems.
www.afiya-trust.org	An organisation that specialises in mental health information for black and minority ethnic communities.
www.anorexiabulimiare.org.uk	Provides advice and support to people with eating disorders.
www.b-eat.co.uk	A UK-wide charity dedicated to providing helplines, online support and self-help groups on all types of eating disorders.
www.beatbullying.org	Support around all aspects of bullying including online.

www.childline.org.uk/Explore/Bullying/Pages/online-bullying.aspx	Information about cyber-bullying, social networking and 'sexting'. Also provide an online support service.
www.childline.org.uk	A place you can talk to someone online if you are worried about anything, including your mental health. You can also call childline on 0800 1111.
www.depressionalliance.org	A wide range of information on depression.
http://www.drinksense.org/en/services-for-young-people	Information about using alcohol safely and getting help.
www.getconnected.org	Free confidential help for young people aged under 25 by phone, text or email.
www.harmless.org.uk	A National voluntary organisation for people who self-harm, or who are affected by family or friends who self-harm.
www.healthtalkonline.org/young-peoples-experiences	Information on all sorts of health related issues from people going through similar experiences.
www.mentalhealth.org.uk	The website of the Mental Health Foundation and includes an A-Z of mental health problems.
www.mind.org.uk	A National Mental Health Charity, providing lots of information and tips.
www.mindfull.org	An online based service for young people aged 11-17 providing support, information and advice. They have an online chat room.

www.nshn.co.uk	The National Self-Harm Network provides a range of information and factsheets about dealing with self-harm.
www.papyrus-uk.org	A charity working to prevent young suicide, with a helpline available.
www.rethink.org/youngpeople	Rethink Mental Illness provides sources of information, support and advice.
www.talktofrank.com	Information and support about drugs.
www.thinkyouknow.co.uk	Provides advice and information about using all aspects of the internet and how to keep yourself safe.
www.time-to-change.org.uk/youngpeople	An England-wide campaign to tackle stigma and discrimination related to mental health.
www.voicecollective.co.uk	Resources for young people who hear, see and sense things that others don't.
www.youngminds.org.uk	Young Minds is a UK-wide charity committed to improving the emotional well-being and mental health of children and young people.
www.right-here-brightonandhove.org.uk/gp-film-and-information	A short film with top tips on preparing to speak to your GP.
http://www.2gether.nhs.uk/moodometer	An online resource and app which helps monitor and understand your emotional well-being.



Activity: list websites and apps you find helpful

Key messages

- There is a lot of information and advice available on the internet – choose ones by charities and the NHS.
- Trust your instincts; if a website seems to be saying something strange, move on and find something else.
- Don't use the internet as a substitute for asking for professional help or tell a trusted adult about how you feel.
- If the first place you try doesn't help, don't give up – keep looking and keep talking.

Myth busters – what’s the truth about mental health?

As a society we’re not very good at talking about our emotions, or how we’re feeling, and there is still stigma and discrimination out there about mental health. (If you’d like to find out more about this, have a look at the Time to Change campaign at www.time-to-change.org.uk/youngpeople.)

Mental health can be difficult to talk about or find out accurate information. In our **‘Finding out more about mental health and illness’**, you can find some sources of information and help.

Here, we look at some of the myths that are out there about mental health, and the facts behind them. These were provided by young people, and are things that they’ve heard themselves.

MYTH: Only certain people experience mental health problems.

FACT: Anyone can experience a mental health problem at any time.

MYTH: People experiencing mental health problems tend to be violent or dangerous.

FACT: This is not true; in fact people who are experiencing mental health problems are statistically more likely to be a victim of violence.

MYTH: Mental health problems are rare.

FACT: 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem in their lifetime.

MYTH: Young people do not experience mental health problems.

FACT: 1 in 10 young people are experiencing mental health problems at any one time. On average, that’s about 3 young people in every school classroom.

- MYTH:** Only some people have mental health.
- FACT:** Everyone has mental health, just as we all have physical health.
- MYTH:** People who experience mental health problems do not recover.
- FACT:** Lots of people do recover from mental health problems, and most people go on to live happy, fulfilling lives.
- MYTH:** There is not much support available for people experiencing mental health problems.
- FACT:** There are lots of places you can go if you are experiencing mental health problems – it's important to talk to a responsible adult who will support you.
- MYTH:** Children don't experience mental health problems until they are teenagers.
- FACT:** Whilst they're less common, younger children can have mental health problems too.
- MYTH:** Learning difficulties and mental health problems are the same.
- FACT:** Mental health problems are about thoughts and feelings, rather than the different ways someone learns.
- MYTH:** You can see if someone has a mental illness.
- FACT:** You can't tell if someone has a mental illness just by looking at them, people with a mental illness are just the same as everyone else.
- MYTH:** It is very rare for young people to self-harm.
- FACT:** Over the past 10 years, the number of young people admitted to hospital relating to self-harm has increased, but that is partly because we understand much better what it is now, and it is being recognised more easily.
- MYTH:** There is nothing we can do to maintain positive wellbeing and look after our own mental health.
- FACT:** There are lots of things we can do to look after our own mental health, just like we look after our physical health, such as going for walks, listening to music, relaxing, switching off technology, eating well and talking to others about how we're feeling.



Activity

Are there any other things you've heard about mental health or mental illness that you're not sure are true?

You could check out whether the things you've heard are correct, or email youngpeople@rethink.org and we will help answer the question.

Key messages

- Have a look at our other resources for the facts about mental health and lots of information.
- Be aware there are lots of myths around about mental health and it's important to find out the truth.
- Don't assume all websites contain helpful information – be selective, and if you have any doubts, look somewhere else.
- Ask professionals lots of questions.

Useful sources of information and support for young people



www.rethink.org/living-with-mental-illness/young-people

www.thesite.org/healthandwellbeing/mentalhealth

www.mindfull.org

www.youngminds.org.uk/for_children_young_people

Doc Ready – an interactive app designed to help you to prepare for a meeting with a GP or health professional: www.docready.org



Rethink Mental Illness is a partner in:

time to change
let's end mental health discrimination



Rethink
Mental
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**Leading the way to a better
quality of life for everyone
affected by severe mental illness.**

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