

Understanding your child's mental health

Guidance and support for parents and carers



This guide shares information, techniques, tools and signposting that parents, carers and children can use to support children's mental health and wellbeing.

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What is mental health?

Mental health exists on a spectrum, Mental health relates to how we think, feel, and behave. Good mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.

The mental health spectrum:

Mental health exists on a spectrum. Everyone has fluctuating mental health levels depending what is going on for them at that time. However, when difficulties last longer, are severe and impact daily life, strategies and support are needed to move towards the healthy end of the spectrum.

Mental health spectrum



Picture of a Mental Health spectrum showing healthy, coping, struggling and unwell. Image adapted the centre for mental health image.

For parents, carers, and families, listening to children and finding out what is happening for them is key.

How common is it to experience mental ill health?

One in four people in the UK experience a mental health problem at some point that affects their daily life, relationships, or physical health.

20% of adolescents may experience a mental health problem in any given year.

These statistics from the Mental Health Foundation show us how important it is to talk about mental health and wellbeing. Just as people can do things to increase their physical health, we can do things to support positive mental health and reduce our chances of becoming unwell e.g. helping your child to practice good self-care, teach them to understand and deal with their stress, ensuring they have a support network, good sleep and nutrition behaviours. It can help to lead by example, showing them how you maintain your own mental health and wellbeing and being open and honest about your thoughts, feelings and emotions

Supporting your child's mental health:

Starting conversations about mental health:

If a child is angry, anxious or distressed, they may not have the ability to problem solve at that time, as their brain may be in fight, flight and freeze mode. This is explained in [this video by Dr Dan Siegel](#). Stay calm, let them know you are there for them, keep them safe and give space if they need it. Talk to them when they feel safe and calm.

If it is a good time to talk:

- Choose a time and place that your child feels safe and comfortable to talk. E.g. that may be just before bedtime, when you are driving somewhere or doing an activity together like going for a walk or watching TV.
- Listen to understand, if your child feels really listened to and understood it is good for their wellbeing. This may include checking with your child you have understood what they are saying.
- Support your child to find solutions and to feel in control of the situation. Relate don't overtake.
- Find time and space to check back in with your child.

Staying Positive

When things are stressful it can be hard to see the positives, research studies show that when more positive than negative interactions occur behaviours and relationships improve, the ratio should be at least 5 positives to 1 negative. Role modelling having a positive outlook is one of the things that can support your child to build resilience. Can you challenge yourself to notice more positives this week?



Image from the Oak grove centre- Quote It takes 5 positive interactions to overcome 1 negative, with a picture of 5 green people and one red person.

Where you have immediate significant concerns about your child's mental health and wellbeing talk to your child about making an appointment with your GP and/or considering some of the options listed below in the 'Local Resources and support for children and young people' section or the 'Mental health crisis support' section below.

Further resources:

FREE COURSE:

Do you want to find out more about children's mental health and wellbeing? Take a free online course for all parents, carers, grandparents and teens living in South Gloucestershire. For the full details and information on how to access the online learning, visit [Free online courses](#) and enter our exclusive South Gloucestershire access code. CONCORDE

- [How to Talk to Your Child about Mental Health \(including conversations starters\)- YoungMinds](#)
- [Supporting Your Child Through Change- YoungMinds](#)
- [Keeping Your Child Safe Online Information- NSPCC](#)
- [Talking to Your Child About Healthy Relationships-NSPCC](#)
- [Understanding Different Mental Health and Wellbeing Conditions- CAMHS A- Z](#)

Tools to support positive wellbeing:



Image: A group of people nurturing a brain filled with flowers.

There are many things that can support your child to manage situations that may make them feel anxious or worried. Simple tools such as breathing exercises can impact how the brain processes information. Practicing these when they feel calm and safe can help difficult situations when they arise.

Stress Bucket

How they are feeling will affect people's ability to deal with life's ups and downs.

Understanding what causes people to feel stressed, anxious or low can be the first step to making them feel better. Identifying positive coping strategies to deal with stress can help even further.

The stress bucket analogy thinks about the stresses coming in and the coping strategies that support people to manage that stress without becoming overwhelmed. This is explained further through the simple [video](#) for children and young people.

Further Resources:

- [Young Minds-Stress Bucket Video and Activity](#)
- [Oxford brain story- Information for parent's carers and individuals about the brain and resilience](#)
- [Anna Freud- Self Regulation skills through play resource preschool children](#)

Tools to help people feel present and calm:

Examples include:

- 5/2/7 Breathing: breathe in for 5, hold for 2 and out for 7. You can adjust the numbers to suit (out needs to be longer).
- [Hand Breathing- See this video](#)
- [Box breathing relaxation technique: how to calm feelings of stress or anxiety- See this video.](#)

Mindfulness Activities: Short mindful practices that can help bring you to the present moment:

- [Muscle Tensing Exercise](#)
- [Food Mindfulness Activity](#)
- Five senses activity: Notice something you can see, hear, touch, taste and feel. Use your hand to count the 5 senses.
- You could support your child to make a [Self Sooth Box- YoungMinds](#)

Encouraging positive activity:

- Help your child identify things that help them feel good such as going for a walk or listening to music.
- Encourage your child to connect to the [5 ways to wellbeing](#): Which are; connect with others, be physically active, learning new skills, give to others, pay attention to the present moment (mindfulness).
- Consider screen time and find the right balance with your child where sleep, exercise and family time are not negatively impacted. See [ChildNet-Advice screen time for parents](#) for more information.
- Support your child to be involved in planning their routines and identify places they can increase their activity. This may include encouraging:
 - Increasing doing things they already enjoy.
 - Trying something new.
 - Supporting them to do something that gives them purpose, e.g. responsibilities such as household chores or getting involved in something they feel passionate about through school or a community group.
 - Identifying barriers such as sleep and coming up with a plan together.

Start small lots of small steps can make a big difference.

Health and wellbeing books:



Picture of book with a person helping another person up

It can be difficult to talk about our emotions, health and wellbeing books may help start a conversation or help you and your child to understand what they are feeling.

Further resources:

[Reading Well Books](#): (Available at all South Gloucestershire libraries relevant for a range of ages)

[Suggested Books for Young Children- Animation](#)

Encourage Your Child's Self-care:

You may wish to support and encourage your child to make a wellbeing plan, they do not need to feel unwell to make a plan. See the links below for some useful resources.

- [Self-care information for children and young people- Anna Freud Centre](#)
- [Self-care plan for primary school aged children- Anna Freud Centre](#)
- [Self-care plan for Secondary school and College age children- Anna Freud Centre](#)

Encourage your child to build their self-esteem and confidence:

Encourage your child to set goals (it is fine to start small!), Take time to do things they enjoy and support them to understand healthy friendships. For more tips about raising self-esteem see [young minds](#).

Encouraging positive health behaviours.

Sleep, nutrition and exercise all have a significant impact on our mental as well as physical health.

Sleep:

Encourage positive sleeping habits with you child.

See the sleep toolkits appropriate to your child's age to support good sleep: [Sleep Toolkits- South Gloucestershire Council](#)

Nutrition

Watch this video [Food and Mood Video- Mind](#) to find out more about the links between food and mood.



Family preparing vegetables together and smiling.

If you concerned your child may have eating issues, please find more information [CAMHS information on eating issues](#).

Being Active

Being active releases endorphins and so is a great way to support both physical and mental health. See this [5 Ways to Get Moving and Feel Better - Video Mind](#) from Mind to find out more. Start small any increase in physical activity is a positive step.

Your own self-care

Parenting is a tough job with many pressures, it is important to look after your own wellbeing to enable you to care for others. There is lots of help and support locally and nationally, so you are not alone, and neither is your child.



Heart hugging itself and looking content.

See [NHS information](#) on the five ways to wellbeing, consider how to connect to the five ways wellbeing.

Use this [NHS quiz](#) to build your own wellbeing action plan.

[ONEYOU South Gloucestershire](#) has a wealth of information and resources from self-help, local and national services to crisis support.

[YoungMinds Parent Helpline](#) - Is available for advice and signposting for parents and carers.

Support for families who have a child aged 0- 25 with additional needs (no diagnosis necessary):

[South Gloucestershire Parent Carers](#): Are the local parent carer forum working to give a voice to parent carers of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

[Jigsaw Thornbury](#) : Have support groups, sensory learning library and training.

[SENDIAS](#) : Support includes Feel more confident and understand the SEND process; Get your views heard and raise your concerns and to feel well prepared when dealing with paperwork and attending meetings.

Local resources and support for children and young people

School Nurses – work with children, young people and their parents/carers to maximise their health and wellbeing [School Nursing Service – Children and Young People’s Services \(sirona-cic.org.uk\)](#)

Ask in your child’s school- it is useful for schools to know if your child is managing a health condition. As they can discuss accessing school with you and direct you to support available through school or agencies that come into school where needed.

Mental Health Support Teams- some schools will have a linked Mental Health Support team see [here](#) for the list of schools.

ChatHealth – is a confidential text messaging service where a young person (Age 11-19) can speak to a school nurse **07312 263093** [ChatHealth – Children and Young People’s Services \(sirona-cic.org.uk\)](#)

Off the Record – is a mental health social movement by and for young people aged 11-25. They run a variety of drop ins, groups, 1:1 support and much more. [Home - OTR \(otrbristol.org.uk\)](#).

Kooth – is an online mental wellbeing community for young people aged 11-18 years. It provides free, safe and anonymous support. There is 1:1 support from an online counsellor, forums, articles, activities and much more. [Home - Kooth](#). See a video explaining the Kooth service to parents [here](#). (Scroll down to see 10-minute parent carer session 2024)

GP – you can make an appointment to visit your doctor or nurse to talk through worries or concerns.

CAMHS – is the higher-level mental health service for children and adolescence. Their website contains lots of information and support [Local community CAMHS: Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust \(awp.nhs.uk\)](#)

NHS Talking Therapies – provide free support to people over the age of 16. There isn't a need for a referral you can contact the service via the digital assistant on the website, online form or by phone. [NHS Talking Therapies - North Somerset & South Gloucestershire \(vitahealthgroup.co.uk\)](#).

South Gloucestershire Children and Young People Mental Health and Wellbeing Directory. There are a range of other community and voluntary sector groups locally that support wellbeing for a more in-depth list and further information on many of the above organisations see the directory [here](#).

National support

Young Minds – provides lots of support and information including a parent helpline <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-helpline/>

The Mix – is a digital charity for under 25s, they provide free, confidential and anonymous support. They help young people take on any challenge they are facing. [The Mix - Essential support for under 25s](#)

Childline – support for anyone under 19, help and advice on a wide range of issues. Talk to a counsellor on the phone (0800 1111) or online, send an email or post on the message board [Childline | Childline](#)

SHOUT – text-based messaging support service for anyone who is struggling to cope. Text SHOUT to 85258 24/7 [Shout - UK's 24/7 Crisis Text Service for Mental Health Support | Shout 85258 \(giveusashout.org\)](#)

BEAT- Online information and support around eating disorders: [Get information and support - Beat \(beateatingdisorders.org.uk\)](#).

Harmless – works to address and overcome issues related to self-harm and suicide. They work with the person who is self-harming, family and friends, people in crisis [Home – Harmless](#).

Zero Suicide Alliance- information to raise suicide awareness and how to support someone with suicidal thoughts see: [Free online training from Zero Suicide Alliance](#)

Mental health crisis support

Emergency: Where someone is in immediate danger, hurt physically or taken an overdose, you can call **999 or 121**.

If it is not a 999 emergency but your child is experiencing an immediate mental health crisis you can call **CAMHS FREE 24/7 mental health response line on 0800 9539599**.

If you are not sure who to contact phone **NHS 111**; where there is a mental health option.

Safeguarding

To report a child safeguarding concern:

Phone 01454 866000 – Monday- Thursday 9am-5pm Friday 9am-4.30pm

Phone 01454 615165 out of hours.

Any queries or concerning this document please contact mentalhealth@southglos.gov.uk