



amazing futures  
for young people



# Peer Supporters Mental Health Handbook



# Introduction

As a Peer Supporter or Intern working with Amazing Futures, you will be supporting young people with SEND. It is highly likely they might also be experiencing problems with their mental health.

So Amaze has put together this handbook to help you feel more comfortable when supporting young people and to help you learn how to look after your mental health within your role as a peer supporter.



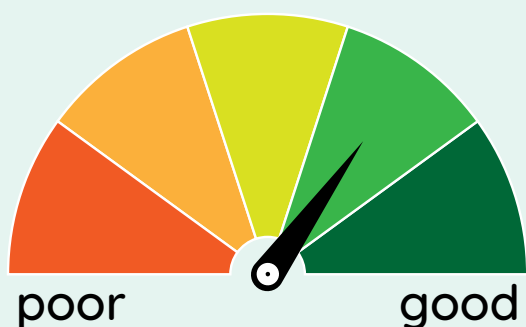
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# Helpful Information and Statistics

Some helpful things to know about mental health:

Mental health is a term to describe how we feel, think and act; like our physical health, it is important to look after it.



Mental health, like most things, is on a spectrum and can range from good to poor

When a young person is experiencing good mental health, they may feel confident and act calmly and happily.



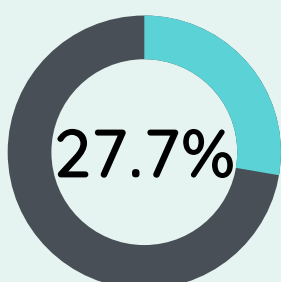
If a young person is experiencing poor mental health, they may have difficulty with the way they're feeling, thinking or acting. This can feel difficult to cope with.

If these negative feelings last for a long time, become overwhelming, and start affecting the young person's day-to-day life, they may need more support.

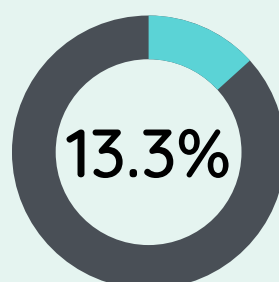
# Helpful Information and Statistics

A few statistics about mental health problems:

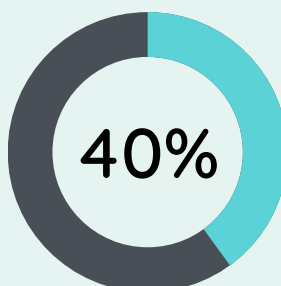
Mental health problems in young people are common and, on the rise. Young people experiencing mental health problems are not alone.



27.2% of young women experience diagnosed mental health conditions

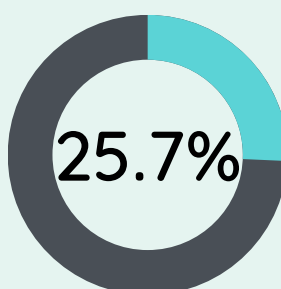


13.3% of young men experience diagnosed mental health conditions

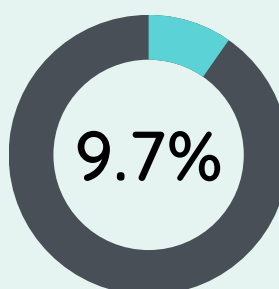


more than 40% of people who identify as non-binary experience diagnosed mental health conditions

**This figure is also thought to be around 35-40% higher for young people with SEND.**



25.7% of women aged 16–24 report having self-harmed at some point in their life



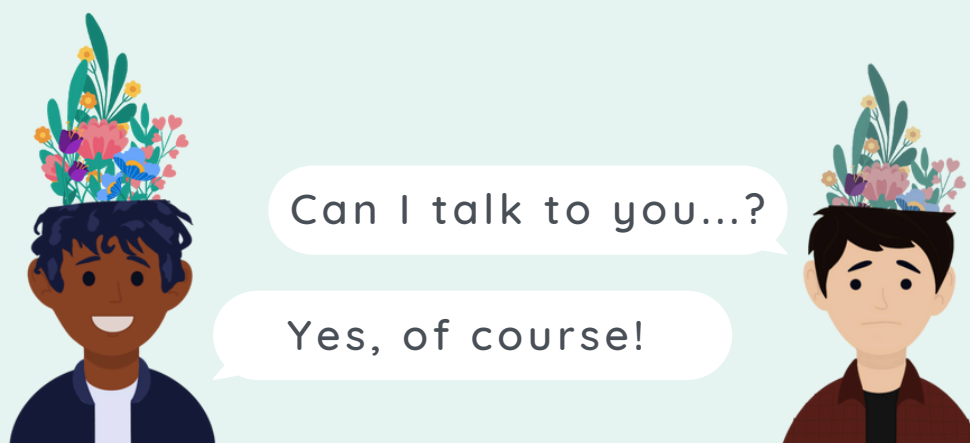
9.7% of women aged 16–24 report having self-harmed at some point in their life

Mental health difficulties in young people are generally mild, and most commonly present as anxiety and depression.

However, in some cases young people may experience more severe symptoms. This can be extremely distressing and overwhelming for the young person experiencing it, but also for the peer supporter hearing about it.

# What you can do to help a young person with their mental health

If a young person begins to share how they are feeling with you, remember it might be the first time they have spoken about their mental health.



This is a positive thing – the young person trusts you enough to share with you and be vulnerable.

**Because of this, they might have difficulty communicating how they feel, for example:**

They may struggle to put their thoughts into words

They might not go into lots of detail e.g  
‘I’m finding things hard right now’, ‘Actually, I’m not fine’ or ‘Lockdown was really hard for me’

They might share things they are struggling with at home, school, university or work.

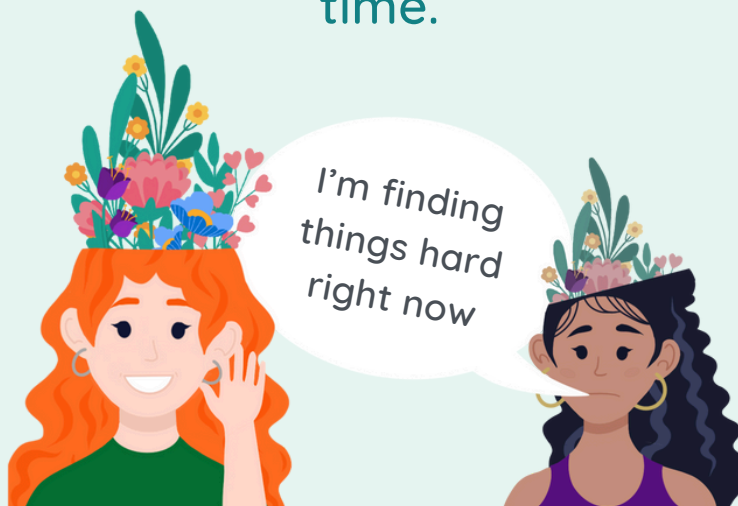
# What you can do to help a young person with their mental health

## 1 Listen

### Be patient:

Let the young person share without interrupting, judging or making assumptions. This will make them feel more comfortable and heard.

Silences are okay. A young person may be quiet because they're thinking about what they want to say. Give them time.



### Be understanding:

You can show you are listening by nodding or repeating what they said to show you have heard and understood.

If they are finding the conversation overwhelming, you could suggest they write their feelings down in a text or on a piece of paper.

Writing thoughts down means a person can take their time to think about what they're trying to say, without worrying how it might come across in conversation, or worrying about becoming emotional in front of you.

# What you can do to help a young person with their mental health

## 2 Reassure

### Be Kind:

Often, when someone has opened up about how they are feeling, they might immediately feel worried that they've said the wrong thing or shared too much.

The best way you can respond is to reassure them that they've done the right thing by speaking about it.

You could say:

'I'm really glad you told me this',

or

'It might have felt difficult to share but it's good that you spoke to me about it'.





# What you can do to help a young person with their mental health

## 3 Let them know their feelings are valid

### Be Supportive

No matter what the young person is struggling with, their experiences are valid and it can be helpful to remind them of this.

You could say something like, 'It's okay to feel like that or, 'what you're going through sounds really tough'.



Sometimes when you are struggling with your mental health, it can feel very lonely. Letting them know that what they're feeling is valid, makes them feel less alone.

Let the young person know that you appreciate them sharing with you. It can take a lot of courage to share with someone.

# What you can do to help a young person with their mental health

## 4 Let others know

### Be Communicative:

You have done so much by being someone the young person can open up to, but there are lots of people and places a young person can go for further help.

**It's not all on you.** You may feel like it's your responsibility alone to help when talking with a young person, but this is not the case.

You might encourage the young person to speak to an Amaze Co-ordinator (e.g. Claire, Sue or Dara), or speak to the Amaze Co-ordinator yourself.

If you are concerned about a young person or worried that they may be in danger you must not keep it to yourself. By sharing with an Amaze Co-ordinator, you are allowing them to support the the young person and keep them safe.

There are lots of other organisations that are able to help a young person. You can speak with the young person and suggest some, or ask whether they would be happy for you to contact a helpline for them.

Find a list of services at the end of the handbook.



# What you can do to help a young person with their mental health

## 5 Look out for yourself

### Be Honest

Sometimes when you have supported a young person who's struggling, you can feel anxious, drained or even triggered by something they have shared with you. It is important you acknowledge when something has upset you. Your feelings are important too.



Be honest with the Amaze Co-ordinator, and let them know how you are feeling about what has been shared.

It is important that you feel you can share if something has affected you, so let others know if you're needing support too.

**We're here for you, too.**

# What to do if you don't know what to say

You're not always going to be able to respond immediately - or at all - when a young person voices concern and that's okay too.

You don't need to have answers. It is okay to not understand their situation or know how to respond.

By listening, giving them space to share and the opportunity to be heard, you let the young person know they are not alone and don't have to suffer in silence. That is a huge help.

But it can be stressful, overwhelming and feel like enormous pressure when you know someone is upset and this can affect your ability to respond. Don't worry.

If you can't think of the right thing to say, sit with it, it may come to you later. In the meantime, show them that they have been heard and understood.

You could say something like,

'What you're going through sounds really tough, it must be really difficult for you. I will have a think about what I can do to help'.

This shows you have heard them and have intention to help.

# What to do if you are worried about a young person

If you suspect that a young person is at serious risk or in imminent danger, call emergency services on 999 immediately. You must then contact one of the designated safeguarding staff - these are Ros, Liam, Rachel or Sally.

## Safeguarding contact information:

Name & Role	Phone number	Email
<b>Ros Cook:</b> Designated Person for safeguarding	07906 674505	ros@amazesussex.org.uk
<b>Liam Ryan</b> Deputy Designated Person for safeguarding	07483 111659	liam@amazesussex.org.uk
<b>Rachel Travers</b> Alternative contact 1	07984 433232	rachel@amazesussex.org.uk
<b>Sally Polanski</b> Alternative contact 2	07904 012555	sallyp@amazesussex.org.uk

On the next page we have created a follow chart to show how to act in different situations

# What to do if you are worried about a young person

## Safeguarding Flowchart:



# What to do if you are worried about a young person

Remember you should tell a member of staff if:

You're very worried about the young person

You want to check the advice you're giving to a young person

If something has upset you or you are feeling upset about supporting a young person and it's affecting your own mental health

If you need to do this urgently, call a member of staff using their mobile number or if you feel the concern is less urgent – raise the issue privately in the next support session.

If urgent and you can't get a hold of a service co-ordinator, contact one of the safeguarding staff, they will act on your concern and advise you what to do next.

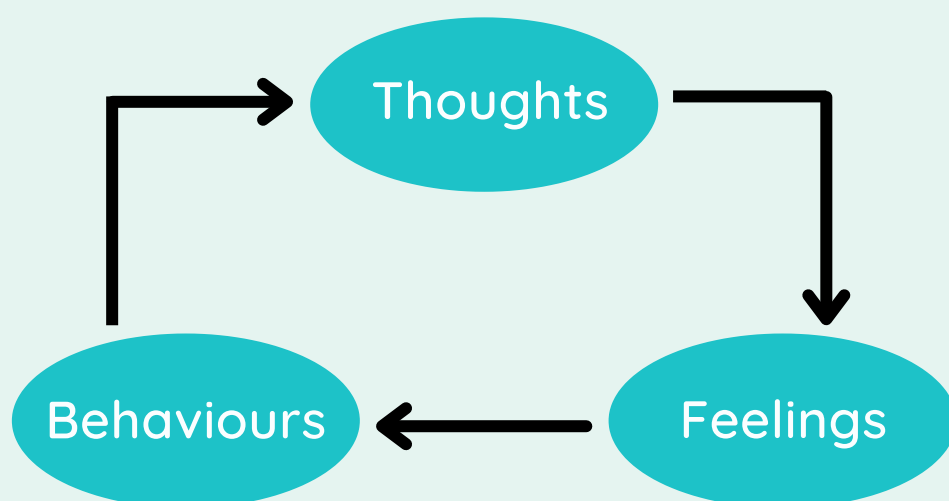
# How mental health problems can look

Although mental health problems can present in similar ways for people, it is extremely important to remember that mental health is personal.

You should listen to the specific difficulties the young person is outlining – as symptoms and struggles will differ for everybody.

What if a young person isn't wanting to talk about how they're feeling?

When a young person is experiencing difficulties with their mental health, it can affect their thoughts, feelings and behaviour.



**If you feel a young person is displaying any of the signs on the next 3 pages, it's vital you contact an Amaze Co-ordinator, to help keep the young person safe.**



# How mental health problems can look

## 1 Thoughts

If a young person is struggling with their mental health there may be a change in their thoughts about themselves or the world around them. These may be noticeable changes in how the young person is communicating or changes that they report to you.

We all have negative thoughts occasionally, but when these thoughts become overwhelming we need to try to help.

Some of these thoughts could include:

### Low self-esteem

e.g thoughts that they are unloved, unlovable or that they keep getting things 'wrong' or are a failure

### Issues with their body image

e.g worrying about how they look, or obsession over food or exercise

### Suicidal thoughts

e.g thoughts that others around them or the world would be better off without them

### Paranoid thoughts

e.g feeling they are being controlled, watched or thoughts are being put in their head.

### Hallucinations

Thinking they are hearing voices or seeing things that aren't really there

### Thoughts from their past which are triggering

e.g losing someone close to them

### Thinking about self-harm

e.g inflicting pain on themselves because they "want to feel something"

# How mental health problems can look

## ② Feelings

If a young person is experiencing problems with their mental health there may be a change in their emotions/feelings. These may be noticeable changes or changes that the young person reports to you.

Emotions vary a lot even when you are experiencing good mental health. So it is important to notice if young people are showing signs that they are not feeling good.

Some of these feelings could include:

**Feeling hopeless**

**Feeling irritable, upset or lonely**

**Feeling as if they want to hurt themselves**

**Feeling worried, anxious or scared a lot**

**Finding themselves getting angry all the time**

**Feeling as if they are numb or their feelings have switched off**

**Feeling like a burden or inconvenience**

**Feeling so happy that they find it overwhelming, their thoughts become very fast, they have lots of energy, resulting in them doing things they later regret**

# How mental health problems can look

## 3 Behaviours

If a young person is experiencing difficulties with the negative feelings described above, this can lead to a change in their behaviour. These may be noticeable changes or changes that the young person reports to you.

Some of these behaviours could include:

**Change in sleeping habits**

e.g. sleeping a lot more than usual or struggling to sleep at all

**Change in eating habits**

e.g. eating a lot more than usual or not wanting to eat much

**Difficulty concentrating and holding attention**

**Avoiding friends, family or social situations**

**Feeling tired/fatigued all the time**

**Not wanting to do things they previously enjoyed**

**Getting into arguments or fights more**

**Self-harming behaviours**

**Smoking, drinking or taking drugs to feel better**

**A dramatic increase in energy wanting to move fast and do lots of things and finding it hard to slow down resulting in doing things you later regret**

# How to look after your mental health

As you will already know, the Amazing Futures groups and activities are based around the 5 ways to wellbeing:

**Connect**

**Be  
Active**

**Take  
Notice**

**Learn**

**Give**

These are things that we all need to build our resilience and wellbeing.

When we do these regularly, it can make us feel happier and healthier

They can help support others, but also you.

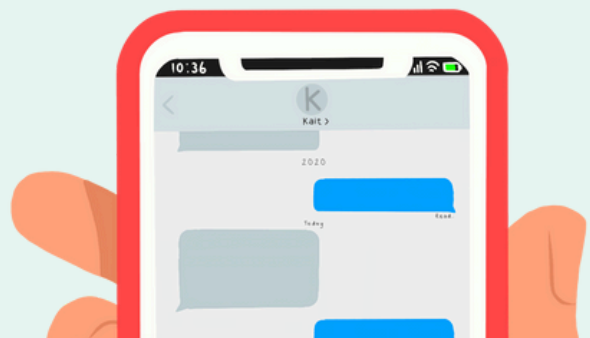


# How to look after your mental health

## 1 Connect

Connecting with others helps improve our mood, helps us feel accepted and increase our self-confidence and helps us support one another.

**You could try:** meeting new people in a group, contacting a friend who you haven't spoken to in a while or writing a letter to a friend or family member.



## 2 Be Active

Regular exercise can boost your mood and self-confidence, increase your energy and help us sleep better.

**You could try** something small, like going on a short walk or taking the stairs instead of a lift, going for a run, swim or dance!

# How to look after your mental health

## 3 Take Notice

Take time to reflect on things. How you are feeling? What is going well in your life? What would you like to change?

These steps can increase our motivation and boost our mood, whilst also taking in the world around you!

We often have hectic, busy lives and forget to check in on ourselves. So, sometimes we don't realise our well-being is suffering because of it.

You could try: writing a diary, taking pictures, asking those around you how they are.



## 4 Learn

Learning is a good way to increase our self-confidence and give us a sense of achievement

You could try: watching a YouTube tutorial, cooking or baking something new, practising a new sport or learning a new language.

# How to look after your mental health

## 5 Give

Giving our time to others can make us feel happier and rewarded, strengthen our relationships, give us a sense of achievement and increase our self-worth.

**You could try:** asking a friend or family member how they are and really listen, offer a stranger or neighbour help with something like their garden or volunteer your time or skills in the community.



# Helpful Services



The Mix - [www.themix.org.uk/](http://www.themix.org.uk/)

YoungMinds - [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

Mind - [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

Childline - [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

Meetoo - [www.meetwo.co.uk/](http://www.meetwo.co.uk/)

Hope Again - [www.hopeagain.org.uk](http://www.hopeagain.org.uk)

Support for young people when someone dies.

OCD Youth - [www.ocdyouth.org](http://www.ocdyouth.org)

Youth Support for young people with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).

Time to Change - [www.time-to-change.org.uk](http://www.time-to-change.org.uk)

iRock East Sussex -

[www.sussexpartnership.nhs.uk/irock](http://www.sussexpartnership.nhs.uk/irock)



# Helpful Services



**Samaritans - 116 123**

**Papyrus/hope-line UK - call - 0800 068 4141  
text - 07860039967**

**Young Minds crisis messenger - text YM to  
85258**

**Beat - helpline (over 18)- 0808 801 0677  
student line - 0808 801 0811  
youthline (under 18) - 0808 801 0711 - helping  
those all ages who are struggling with eating  
disorders/difficulties with food**

**No panic - 0844 967 4848 / youthline - 01753  
840393 - helping those with panic disorders,  
anxiety, OCD and Phobias**

**Anxietyuk - 03444 775 774 or text 07537  
416905**

# Notes



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## REFERENCES

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Mind - <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/mental-health-problems-introduction/difficult-feelings-behaviours/>

YoungMinds - <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/supporting-a-friend-with-their-mental-health/>

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**amazing futures**  
for young people

Designed and Produced by  
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With feedback from the fabulous young people who  
access Amazing Futures