

Growing Together

action
mental
health

Tips for parents and carers

During Children's Mental Health Week, **7-13 February 2022**, the theme of which is Growing Together, Action Mental Health is encouraging children and adults to consider how they can grow and improve their mental health awareness and support their wellbeing.

Action Mental Health offers a host of resources to help every child and young person in Northern Ireland on their journey to becoming a mentally resilient adult.

The need to support our mental health has rarely been greater, with repeated Covid-19 lockdowns causing disruption, uncertainty, anxiety among our children – with many of our youngest school kids knowing nothing else since starting school.

1 in 6 children and young people have a diagnosable mental health problem, and many continue to have these problems into adulthood.

50% of those with lifetime mental health problems first experience symptoms by the age of 14.

1 in 10 boys aged 5-19 with a mental health condition are excluded in some form from school.

But help is out there and AMH has gathered useful advice, information and help for young people aged 4-25.



*The Five Ways to Wellbeing was developed by New Economics Foundation. It is a set of evidence-based actions designed to improve personal wellbeing.

#ChildrensMentalHealthWeek

Anxiety in children

For a significant number of children growing up brings the challenge of mental health problems. One in six children will experience mental health issues, with the most prevalent types being anxiety and depression.

What are the signs of anxiety in children?

When young children feel anxious, they cannot always understand or express what they are feeling. They can become irritable, tearful or clingy, have difficulty sleeping, wake in the night, start wetting the bed and have bad dreams.

Older children may experience a lack confidence to try new things or seem unable to face simple, everyday challenges, find it hard to concentrate, have problems with sleeping or eating, have angry outbursts, have a lot of negative thoughts, or keep thinking that bad things are going to happen and start avoiding everyday activities, such as seeing friends, going out in public or going to school.

How to help your child in an anxious moment

Breathe slowly and deeply together.

Count slowly to five as you breathe in, and then five as you breathe out. If this is too much, try starting with shorter counts. If it works for them, gradually encourage your child to breathe out for one or two counts longer than they breathe in, as this can help their body relax.

Sit with them and offer calm physical reassurance.

Feeling you nearby, or holding your hand or having a cuddle if it's possible, can be soothing.

Try using all five senses together.

Connecting with what they can see, touch, hear, smell and taste can bring them closer to the present moment and reduce the intensity of their anxiety. Think together about five things they can see, four things they can touch, three things they can hear, two things they can smell and one thing they can taste.

Reassure them that the anxiety will pass and that they will be okay.

It can be helpful to describe it as a wave that they can ride or surf until it peaks, breaks and gets smaller.

Ask them to think of a safe and relaxing place or person in their mind.

It could be their bedroom, a grandparent's house, a favourite place in nature or somewhere they've been on holiday. Sometimes holding a memento of a relaxing place, like a seashell or pebble, can help.

Encourage them to do something that helps them to feel calmer.

This could be running, walking, listening to music, painting, drawing or colouring-in, writing in a journal, watching a favourite film or reading a favourite book.

Helping a young person through periods of depression

As a parent, it can be useful to understand the difference between having a generally low mood and feeling depressed.

If your child is experiencing a low mood, they may feel more sad, tearful, worried, tired or angry than usual, or feel low and less confident about themselves – but then feel better after a few days or weeks. They may also start to feel better quite quickly after making small changes in their life or routine – for example after resolving a disagreement with a friend, getting to the end of a stressful time at school or starting a more regular sleeping pattern.

When a young person is depressed, sadness and low feelings do not change or go away with time. These feelings can become overwhelming and stop them from doing or enjoying things they normally would. When a young person is experiencing this, it's very difficult to shift the situation without extra help and support.

While every young person is different, and these feelings are often expressed differently at different ages, some signs that your child may be feeling depressed include:

- withdrawing, or avoiding friends or social situations
- finding it hard to concentrate, and/or losing interest in schoolwork
- not wanting to do things they previously enjoyed
- feeling irritable, angry or frustrated
- feeling tearful, miserable, lonely or hopeless
- feeling empty or numb
- being very self-critical, or feeling less confident
- sleeping more or less than normal
- eating more or less than normal
- feeling tired or not having any energy
- showing less or no interest in self-care activities like washing
- wanting to self-harm
- experiencing suicidal thoughts



If your child is experiencing one or two of these things, it does not necessarily mean that they are experiencing depression. But it's important to speak to your GP as a first step so that you can explore what's going on together.

You can find further help at: [Young Minds](#), [Place2Be](#), [The Mix](#) and [NHS](#).

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Sources of support

- Click [HERE](#) for Minding Your Head
- Click [HERE](#) for Childline
- Click [HERE](#) for Libraries NI resources
- Click [HERE](#) for Parenting NI
- Click [HERE](#) for Our Generation resources
- Click [HERE](#) for CYPSP Youth wellness website for age specific resources in NI
- Click [HERE](#) for Text a Nurse
- Click [HERE](#) to visit OCD Action for Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Click [HERE](#) to visit Triumph Over Phobia for phobia disorders
- You can call The No Panic Helpline on 01952 680835 for a recorded breathing exercise to help you through a panic attack (available 24/7). Find out more [HERE](#)
- MeeToo is a free app for teenagers (11+) providing resources and a fully-moderated community where you can share your problems, get support and help other people too. Download via Google Play or App Store and [HERE](#)



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For more information visit www.amh.org.uk