

Parents & carers fact sheet

Recognising signs

Looking out for your child's physical and emotional wellbeing, but recognising when they might need mental health support can sometimes feel challenging. As a parent/carers there are times when you may have significant concerns about your child and this can feel very worrying and hard to know how to help.

It is important that as a parent of a young person who is struggling with their mental health that you also build a support network around you, one or two people who you'd feel comfortable asking for emotional and practical support. This might be a friend or a family member, or someone else that you and your child trusts.

It can be especially hard sometimes to understand the rationality of a concern - for example: anxiety - when the cause of the anxiety may not be obvious to you. Or for example with eating disorders, when a young person feels overweight, but in reality they are very underweight.

The key message is that its important to accept how your child is feeling, even if as a parent you may not understand it or see things differently. Wanting to understand and accepting the difficulty is real for your child is incredibly important and helpful for your child.

What to look out for →



What to look out for

Children and young people may not always tell you directly that they are feeling anxious, down, or overwhelmed. Instead, you might notice changes in their behaviour, emotions, or daily activities. Here are some possible signs to look for:



1 **Heightened sensitivity to criticism or rejection**

- Overreacting to mild feedback or constructive criticism
- Extreme fear of failure or making mistakes
- Avoiding situations where they may feel judged or evaluated

2 **Changes in mood**

- Persistent sadness, irritability, or worry
- Excessive crying or unexplained anger outbursts
- Feeling “flat” or detached from things they used to enjoy

3 **Withdrawal from friends or family**

- Reduced interest in spending time with family or friends
- Becoming more isolated or spending longer periods alone
- Loss of interest in hobbies or activities they once enjoyed

4 **Decline in school performance**

- Sudden drop in grades or difficulty concentrating
- Struggles to complete homework or lacks motivation for schoolwork
- Frequent absences or reluctance to go to school

5 **Changes in eating or sleeping patterns**

- Eating much more or less than usual
- Sudden weight gain or loss
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep, or sleeping much longer than usual

6 **Increased physical complaints**

- Regular headaches, stomach aches, or other unexplained pains
- Increased visits to the school nurse or complaints of feeling unwell

7 **Risky or self-destructive behaviours**

- Engaging in risky activities without regard for consequences
- Self-harm (such as cutting or other intentional injury)
- Talking about or expressing feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness



Remember, every child is different

These signs do not always indicate a mental health problem; children and young people all go through phases and changes as they grow. However, if you notice several of these behaviours happening often, it may be a good time to open up a conversation with your child and consider seeking further advice.

Taking next steps

If you're concerned about your child's wellbeing, start by having an open, gentle conversation. Let them know that you're there to listen without judgement. If needed, seek help from a health professional as this can make a significant difference.

Take a look at our **Sources of Support** Information sheet which can be found in our parents resources library on our website.

Being a supportive parent also means knowing where you can turn for help and advice. There are several networks and resources specifically designed to support parents and carers. Your GP is a great first point of contact. They can help assess your child's needs, offer guidance, and, if necessary, refer your child to specialised services.

Remember, seeking support doesn't just help your child – it also ensures you have the tools and reassurance to guide them through challenging times.

