

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Children's Mental Health

With 75% of mental health problems in adult life (excluding dementia) starting by the age of 18 - it's clear that the sooner you can spot the signs in childhood, the better.

There's lots of changes in the behaviour in young people as they grow up. While many of these come with the territory of teenage life, altogether, they could be pointing to mental health conditions like depression and anxiety. If your child is showing these signs they will need further support with the help of your GP or local support services.

Here is a simple way to remember some of the signs and what to look out for if you've started to feel concerned about your child's mental health - M-A-S-K:

- **M – MOOD**

They get irritable, argumentative or aggressive towards you. They may blame you if things go wrong. They can also become withdrawn.

- **A – ACTIONS**

They may experience changes in eating and sleeping patterns. Look out for any signs of bullying, alcohol, drugs or self-harm.

- **S - SOCIAL**

They suddenly appear especially bored, lonely or withdrawn or they start to get into trouble. Losing interest in friends and other things they liked to do or missing school are common warning signs.

- **K - KEEP TALKING**

Refusing or being reluctant to talk about how they're feeling is common. But keep listening and ask how they are feeling. When they do open up, make sure they know there's someone there who really cares.

What can I do to help?

Talking to your child is a key part of understanding what they might be going through. The best way to approach this is with a casual conversation – ask them how they are feeling and letting them say what they want to say will help.

The chat doesn't have to go straight into asking about their mental health, it's more about asking about their day and making sure you make the time to listen. The more you talk and listen - the sooner your child will know that they can talk to you when they need to.

Linking a young person to self-help information they can read and use at their own pace will allow them some privacy and the opportunity to do this in their own time.

It is important to encourage a child or young person to look after themselves by eating healthily, getting enough exercise and sleeping well. How they feel physically will have a huge impact on their emotional health.

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