



Mental Health Recognition and Treatment

FACT SHEET

Figuring out the difference between normal childhood and teenage behaviour or a more severe problem can be confusing. However if common signs or symptoms last weeks or months and are getting in the way of daily life at home or school, then it is worth discussing the situation with a health professional.

If you experience any of the following it may be time to seek some help:

- > Feeling frequently sad, irritable, anxious or worried.
- > Frequent headaches, backaches or tummy pains.
- > Trouble sitting still or doing one thing for a long period.
- > Trouble with eating or sleeping.
- > Unexplained weight gain or loss, frequent dieting or excessive exercise.
- > Repeated tantrums, aggression or disobedience.
- > No longer interested in or enjoying usual activities.
- > Avoiding friends or family.
- > A sudden decline or improvement in school grades.
- > Lacking energy.
- > Problems fitting in or getting on with others.
- > Thoughts of suicide or harm to self, including cutting or burning.
- > Frequent risky, reckless or destructive behaviour.
- > Repeated smoking, drinking or drug use.
- > Getting into trouble with police, lying, stealing.
- > Any other changes to behaviour or mood that are unexplained.

Mental health problems may respond better if children and families access help and treatment early.

Many people find talking about mental health issues challenging. Here are some suggested questions to get the conversation started. When children do communicate something, then acceptance, listening and acknowledgement are vital.

Questions to start the conversation:

- > I am wondering how you are feeling about (insert situation)?
- > Can you tell me more about what is going on?
- > Feeling sad/angry is something we all experience. Can you tell me about what is happening?
- > Would you like to talk to someone about what is going on? I can help you arrange something.
- > Are you okay? I am here if you want to talk.
- > I have noticed that you are in your room a lot lately, is there something going on?
- > Can you tell me more about what is happening? How you are feeling?
- > If ever you are having a tough time, I am willing to talk about it.
- > You seem a bit down, do you want to talk about it?

During these conversations it is important to:

- > Choose a time that is comfortable for you and your child. Sometimes a car ride or a walk may be easier.
- > Listen openly and communicate concern, understanding and a willingness to talk.
- > Normalise and acknowledge distress.
- > Ask open questions and give space for the answers.
- > Don't try and talk them out of their feelings or perspectives. Validate and acknowledge.
- > Ask them what they have considered might help.
- > Keep your own emotions in check and avoid blame and criticism.
- > Communicate a willingness to help.
- > Offer for them to write things down if they are having trouble talking.

Mental Health Emergencies

If a child in your life is harming themselves or thinking of suicide get help immediately.

Call the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) Urgent Mental Health Support Line on **1800 048 636**. This is a 24 hour service in collaboration with the Mental Health Emergency Response Line. In an emergency call 000 or take the child or young person to the nearest hospital emergency department.

Help for mental health

After discussing the situation with the child, it might be that you need to organise professional help for them and their family. They may need reassurance that help is available and it is possible to feel better. Let them know you will support them to explore the options and find the help that is right for them.

Before attending the first appointment it can be helpful to prepare yourself and your child for the experience. Go to raisingchildren.net.au and enter 'teenage mental health assessment' into the search tool for overviews of common parent concerns.

The following services are available in Western Australia to help young people and families with mental health assessment and treatment.

Headspace
headspace.org.au

Youth Focus
youthfocus.com.au

Youth Link
youthlink.perthwa.net

Youth Futures
youthfutureswa.org.au

CAMHS
health.wa.gov.au

Helping Minds

helpingminds.org.au

Provides support to individuals, families and carers. A range of free, professional and confidential counselling and support programs are provided for children aged 8-18, and adults who have a friend or family member affected by mental illness or are at risk of developing a mental illness themselves.

It is also helpful for young people to explore and utilise websites and other online resources including:

ReachOut
au.reachout.com

YouthBeyondBlue
youthbeyondblue.com

Inspire
inspire.com

Young people may also find apps helpful to emotional well-being and recovery. Reachout provides a range of apps.

Many families choose to access private psychological services through their general practitioner.

The **Mental Illness Fellowship of WA** website provides useful telephone and referral service information.
mifwa.org.au

Carers WA provides support for parents and families who are carers of someone with a mental illness.
carerswa.asn.au