

What is special about the mental health of young people?

This information was sourced from <http://mentalhealthireland.ie>

Mental health means much more than just the absence of mental illness. It is about physical and emotional well-being, about having the strength and capacity to live a full and creative life, and also the flexibility to deal with its ups and downs.

Childhood, from infancy through adolescence, is the time when mental health is developed. Apart from basic physical needs such as food and shelter, children need enough love and security to make them feel safe, happy and confident.

Whether these needs are fulfilled depends very much on how far the adults around young people (at home, at school and in the community) can look after them, and create the right conditions for them to form satisfactory relationships, to make the most of their abilities and talents and to prepare them for taking on adult responsibilities.

Young people are introduced at an early age to the importance of physical well-being and its maintenance, but the equal importance of a healthy mind in the development of the whole person is not given the same emphasis.

Young people can experience all sorts of pressures and difficulties. Some problems can have a serious and significant effect on a young person's future.

It is not easy for children and young people to grow up in today's complex society. There is so much that is going on: so many changes in values, new kinds of pressures – at school or in employment, from TV, information technology, the media and worldwide events, and from family life in its many different forms. Most children cope well enough; with the backup of those around them they can enjoy and make the most of their opportunities. Some however don't do so well. Without the right circumstances and support, problems may arise which can have a

significant effect on a young person's future and can potentially lead to serious difficulties.

Families may be under great strain coping with separation, divorce, or bereavement. Illness and disability suffered by the child or other members of the family may produce particular emotional difficulties. Perhaps there are housing problems or financial hardships. Some parents may lack support when they need it, and find themselves unable to look after their children, as they would want to.

Others may not be able to cope well enough to promote their children's growth and development, and neglect or abuse may result.

When things go wrong, children and young people can experience all kinds of difficulties. They may not sleep well, have nightmares or night fears, or wet the bed. They can have difficulties in learning or become disruptive in the classroom. They may become increasingly fussy about food or cleanliness, or, as teenagers, develop eating problems. They may become very sad and depressed and try to harm themselves, or even become suicidal. Perhaps they have trouble making friends, or find relationships at home increasingly difficult. Children can also become fearful, feel intimidated and resent what is expected of them. They may not want to grow up and take responsibility. Some withdraw. Others become aggressive, attacking authority, being destructive, getting into fights and trouble.

What about professional help?

While parents may find it difficult to distinguish between the normal difficulties young people experience, and problems which need professional help, it is important to recognise the value of early intervention for any young person experiencing mental health difficulties. There are a range of services and professionals who specialise in helping and working with young people and their families. Your GP can advise you on any concerns you may have and put you in touch with any other services needed.

What can young people do to help themselves?

Developing an awareness of stress points and responses, which enable young people to take control of potentially damaging issues, can help prevent the build-up of worries which can affect their mental well-being.

The following short tips might help:

- **Pay attention to lifestyle**
Doing too much or too little can affect mental health. A good balance is needed between work and relaxation
- **Get involved**
Having contact with others whose company you enjoy, at school, at home or as a member of a club, helps to develop social interaction
- **Keep active**
Just as the state of mental health can affect physical health, the reverse is also true
- **Talk about it**
It is important to have someone to go to with problems and worries, such as friends, teachers or family members
- **Keep in touch with friends**
Share your worries when possible
- **Ask for help**
Be aware of problems and seek help if necessary.

SpunOut.ie

provides young people with an accessible, youth-led, youth-friendly support service that is available 24 hours per day all year round. It features over 2,000 quality fact-sheets and articles covering issues such as sexual health, alcohol and drugs, mental health, suicide, eating disorders, bullying, exams, money, work and education. There's an all-Ireland database of over 1,000 searchable support contacts, moderated discussion forums, audio and video resources and 100s of articles written by young people on issues ranging from anti-social behaviour to the environment.

www.SpunOut.ie National Youth Website

