



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive



Your Mental Health Information Booklet

The information in this booklet has been sourced from:

- HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention
www.nosp.ie
- Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland
www.mindingyourhead.info
- Irish College of Psychiatrists
www.irishpsychiatry.com
- Royal College of Psychiatrists UK
www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinformation

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Introduction

This booklet has been produced as part of the 'Your Mental Health' awareness campaign, which aims to improve awareness and understanding of mental health and well-being in Ireland.

In planning this campaign, we asked Irish people in a major national survey about their awareness of and attitudes to mental health and what it means. The responses were mixed. While most Irish people agreed that *anyone can experience a mental health problem* (85%), most people also admitted that if they had a problem they wouldn't want other people to know about it (62%).

The challenge for the 'Your Mental Health' awareness campaign is to make it okay to talk about mental health in everyday life. It is something that can be good or bad and is an important part of all of us.

This booklet aims to:

- highlight some of the things we can do to look after our mental health,
- encourage us to look out for the people around us, and
- give an overview of some common mental health problems.

The booklet also lists some of the organisations and agencies that provide advice and help on mental health issues.

The 'Your Mental Health' campaign has been developed by the HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention, in consultation with voluntary and statutory partners, as part of *Reach Out* – the National Strategy for Action on Suicide Prevention. The booklet was reviewed by Sandra Hogan, Aware; Brian Howard, Mental Health Ireland; Kahlil Thompson Coyle, Schizophrenia Ireland; and Dr Rachael Cullivan, Irish College of Psychiatrists.

About mental health

Mental health is something we all have. We should look after it in the same way we look after our physical health.

You can maintain good mental health and manage problems with your mental health in a similar way to how you manage your physical health. Sometimes the steps you take to maintain both are the same.

Good mental health is vital to all of us. Learn to look after yours.

Minding your mental health

Accept yourself

We're all different, but the one thing we have in common is that none of us is perfect. Many different things, including our background, race, gender, religion and sexuality, make us who we are. Everyone has something to offer and everyone is entitled to respect, including you. Try not to be too hard on yourself.

Get involved

Meeting people and getting involved in new things can make all the difference – for you and for others. Join a club, meet up with friends, do a course – there are many things to do if you look around. Not only will you feel better, but you will benefit from supporting others too.

Keep active

Regular exercise can really help to give your mental health a boost. Find something you enjoy – sport, swimming, walking, dancing or cycling – and then just do it. It may be hard work, but it is worth the effort. Regular exercise can help you feel more positive.

Eat healthily

Having a balanced diet will not only help the way you feel, but it will also help the way you think. Try to eat regularly and aim to eat five portions of fruit and vegetables every day. Good food is essential for your mind and body to work properly.

Stay in touch with friends

You don't have to 'be strong' and struggle on alone. Friends are important, especially at difficult times, so it is good to keep up contact with them.

Relax

If too much 'busy-ness' is getting you down, make time to relax. Fit things into your day that help you unwind, like listening to music, reading or watching films. Find something that you enjoy and that will work for you. Even 10 minutes of 'downtime' during a busy day can make all the difference and help you manage stress better.

Do something creative

All kinds of creative things can help when you are anxious or low. They can also increase your confidence. Music, writing, painting, poetry, cooking, gardening – experiment until you find something that suits you.

Don't binge drink

Drinking alcohol to deal with problems will only make things worse. It is best to drink in moderation and avoid binge-drinking. Overdoing it can damage your health and won't help you to deal with the cause of your worries.

Talk about it

Many of us can feel isolated and overwhelmed by problems sometimes. Talking about how you feel will help. Confide in someone you trust and if you feel there is nobody to talk to, call a helpline such as the one run by Samaritans – 1850 60 90 90.

Ask for help

If you were feeling physically sick you would see a doctor, so don't be embarrassed about getting help for your mental health. Everyone needs help from time to time and there is nothing wrong with asking for it. In fact, asking for help is a sign of personal strength.

Look out for others

Problems with friends or family, work or school as well as normal everyday stress can make you over-sensitive, irritable, lazy, withdrawn or rebellious. These feelings are normal and will usually pass, but if they don't go away they can be the symptoms of a mental health problem. The signs listed below might indicate a mental health problem.

- Withdrawal from friends, family, school, work, sports or other things that are usually enjoyable
- A major change in mood or inappropriate responses to certain situations
- Disturbed sleep – either not getting enough or sleeping too much
- Disturbed eating patterns – either eating less than normal or over-eating
- Pre-occupation and obsession about a particular issue
- Lack of care for personal appearance or personal responsibilities
- A drop in performance at work or school or in hobbies
- Doing things that don't make sense to others or hearing or seeing things that nobody else can hear or see.

If you think that someone you know might be having problems, look out for the signs and symptoms listed on page seven and talk to them about it. Most people will turn to a friend for support during tough times, so being there for your friends can really help.

Remember, it is important to look after your own mental health, so don't take on more than you feel comfortable with. Talk to someone about your concerns. You are not responsible for everyone else, but you can offer support.

It can be a huge worry if someone tells you that they have thoughts of suicide. Sometimes they don't want you to tell anyone else, but you must explain to them that you can't keep this to yourself and that you can help them get the support they need. If someone confides in you, it means they are reaching out for help. If they didn't want help, they wouldn't have told you.

Coping with life's problems

As we grow older, we experience change in nearly every part of our lives. Negative life experiences can be stressful and this stress can affect our mental health. These experiences include:

- bullying or harassment,
- relationship problems,
- losing your job, and
- losing a loved one.

Bullying or harassment

Many people will experience bullying. Anyone can be bullied - it isn't restricted by age, race, gender, religion or sexuality. It can happen anywhere, from the classroom or sporting field to the

home or the workplace. Being a victim of bullying may cause you to feel upset, threatened, humiliated or vulnerable.

Bullying can cause physical, mental and social pain and can make you feel alone, scared, angry, confused or sad. All of these can affect your mental health. If you experience bullying or harassment, talk to someone about it, whether it's a school counsellor, employee support service, family member, friend or your doctor.

Relationship problems

Relationship break-up can affect your health, bringing a range of powerful emotions, such as fear or uncertainty for the future, anger, sadness, loneliness and isolation, and often a sense of failure. It can be difficult to adjust to new circumstances and this can affect your mental health.

Worrying about the impact of relationship break-up, separation or divorce on your children can add to the stress of your situation. Family or relationship counselling can help you to cope with relationship problems.

Losing your job

Losing your job can affect your mental health in a variety of ways. It usually means a loss of income, status, daily routine and social contact. Long-term unemployment can be equally devastating, leading to isolation, low self-esteem and money worries. All of these can affect your mental health. Taking part in training courses or schemes, such as those organised by the Local Employment Service Network (see www.fas.ie), can help you get back on track.

Losing a loved one

At some point in our lives we all experience the pain of losing someone we love through death. For young people, the experience is usually new and might not be spoken about. As we go through life, the experience of bereavement becomes more familiar, extending to our family, friends, colleagues and even to spouses

and unfortunately, on occasion, our children. Bereavement can have a serious impact on your health. When someone dies, you enter the process of grieving. There is no right or wrong way to grieve and you can experience a wide range of emotions as you come to terms with someone's death.

Normal feelings include being stunned at the loss, longing for the person who has died, anger towards yourself, health workers or others, guilt over a last encounter or what you would have liked them to know, sadness or depression. It is not unusual for you to think you hear or see the person who has died in your daily life. This can be part of the grieving process.

Eventually, the shock of bereavement and the strength of your feelings should begin to fade, but it does take time to go through this process and it may affect your mental health. If this happens, it is important to get help through your doctor or a bereavement support group (see Support services page 15).

Feel like you just can't cope?

Problems with alcohol or drugs

During difficult times in life, people sometimes turn to alcohol or other drugs. Alcohol and drug misuse can damage your mental health. Signs that alcohol or drugs are becoming a serious problem include:

- becoming dependent and needing alcohol or drugs to function; and
- letting alcohol or drugs begin to affect your relationships, work or family life.

If you are concerned about your alcohol or drug use or someone else's, talk to your doctor.

Self-harm and suicide

Sometimes distressing problems can appear permanent and it can seem that things will never get better. This can be a scary and lonely place to be.

Self-harm is used by some people as a way to try to escape from or deal with pain or stress that they cannot tolerate in their lives.

If you have self-harmed or are thinking about it, there are people who can help you work through your problems who will not judge you. Talk to someone about how you feel. If you would prefer to talk to someone without giving your name, there are organisations that can help (see below).

Having thoughts of suicide is not uncommon. But it is very important to know that if you are having these thoughts, you need help and support to deal with whatever is causing you to feel this way. Every problem has a solution, but sometimes because you are feeling so low you can't see it.

You are not alone and there are people who can help you find a solution and work through your problems, no matter how difficult they appear to you. Talk to someone you can trust and tell them how you are feeling.

If you, or someone you know, is in crisis and needs someone to talk to:

- contact Samaritans on 1850 60 90 90 (Republic of Ireland) or 08457 90 90 90 (UK including Northern Ireland);
- contact your local doctor, listed under 'General Practitioners' in the Golden Pages, or visit www.icgp.ie;
- go to, or contact, the Accident and Emergency department of your nearest hospital; or
- call the emergency services on 999 or 112.

Common mental health problems

While mental health problems are fairly common, they are sometimes misunderstood. This is a brief outline of some of these problems. If you are concerned that you, or someone you know, might be showing signs of a mental health problem, it is important to get support. Support can range from informal help from friends or family, advice from your doctor, counselling or medication.

Depression

We all feel fed up, miserable or sad from time to time. These feelings don't usually last longer than a few days or a week, and they don't interfere too much with our lives. Sometimes there's a reason, but sometimes these feelings just come out of the blue. We usually cope with them ourselves. We may have a chat with a friend but don't otherwise need any help.

You may be *depressed*, or experiencing depression, when:

- the symptoms of depression last for two weeks or more, and
- the symptoms interfere with your everyday life.

Symptoms of depression include:

- feelings of sadness or hopelessness,
- difficulty with daily activities,
- difficulty concentrating, and
- changes in sleeping or eating patterns.

Depression can occur from a young age or can come late in life. It can also be associated with physical health problems or negative experiences. The symptoms of depression, regardless of your life stage or circumstances, should be taken seriously and never dismissed as 'understandable'.

The feeling of depression is much more powerful and unpleasant than the short episodes of unhappiness that we all experience from time to time. Due to the length of time it lasts and its impact on your life and relationships, you need to get help for depression as soon as possible.

Bipolar disorder

Bipolar disorder used to be called 'manic depression'. As the name suggests, it is characterised by mood swings – or episodes – that are beyond what most people experience in their lives, although they can also be subtle and gradual.

With bipolar disorder, moods can swing between low, high and mixed.

A low mood involves feelings of intense depression and despair. This is known as a *depression* and symptoms include those listed above.

A high mood involves feelings of elation. This is also known as *mania* or a manic period. Symptoms include impaired judgement, over-spending, too much energy and little need for sleep, anger or irritability and unrealistic beliefs in one's own abilities.

A mixed mood involves, for example, depressed mood with the restlessness and overactivity of a manic episode.

People usually experience both depressive and manic episodes, but some will have only manic episodes.

Bipolar disorder affects about one in every 100 adults. It can start at any time during or after the teenage years, although it is unusual for it to start after the age of 40. Men and women are affected equally.

Anxiety

Anxiety is a common experience for both men and women. Depending on the type and severity of anxiety, it can have a damaging impact on your quality of life. For some, anxiety can

be a passing emotion attached to stressful situations such as exams, getting married or work pressures. For others, it is more than this. The signs associated with anxiety include a racing heart, rapid breathing, feelings of panic, sweating, excessive and undue worrying, disturbed sleep, tense muscles, morbid thoughts and fear of going mad.

Although in some instances your anxiety may have no apparent cause, people who are considered most 'at risk' of developing an anxiety disorder include those who have undergone a major life event such as bereavement, a relationship break-up or unemployment; those who misuse drugs and alcohol; or those with a family history of anxiety.

Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a serious mental illness marked by disturbances in your thoughts, perceptions, emotions and behaviour. It affects about one in every 100 people worldwide. It is rare before the age of 15, but it can start any time after this, most often between the ages of 15 and 35.

The symptoms of schizophrenia are broken into two groups – 'positive' and 'negative' symptoms. Positive symptoms include the more recognisable things like hallucinations, hearing voices, delusions, muddled thinking and feeling that you are being controlled. 'Negative' symptoms are less easy to spot and include a loss of energy, enthusiasm and motivation, difficulty concentrating and uneasiness in other people's company.

People with schizophrenia can and do recover. For more information, contact Schizophrenia Ireland on 1890 621 631 or log onto www.sirl.ie or www.recover.ie – the Schizophrenia Information Resource.

Support services

The services listed below have a lot of experience in helping people to overcome their problems. If you would like to talk to someone in confidence, they can help.

Please note: This is not a complete list of voluntary support services. Your local HSE Health Office will be able to provide a more detailed guide to support services available in your area. Call the HSE info line on 1850 24 1850 or log onto www.hse.ie for contact details.

Aware – Defeat Depression

72 Lower Leeson Street, Dublin 2.

Office: (01) 661 7211 Helpline: 1890 303 302 (7 days, 10am - 10pm)

www.aware.ie info@aware.ie

AWARE provide vital emotional support and information to those who experience depression, and their families.

Barnardos

Christchurch Square, Dublin 8.

Office: (01) 454 9699 Callsave: 1850 222 300

www.barnardos.ie info@barnardos.ie

Barnardos is committed to the best interests of children and young people in Ireland, promoting and respecting their rights.

GROW in Ireland

Ormonde Home, Barrack Street, Kilkenny

Infoline: 1890 474 474 www.grow.ie info@grow.ie

Grow is a mental health organisation that helps people who have suffered, or are suffering, from mental health problems.

Mental Health Ireland

Mensana House, 6 Adelaide Street, Dun Laoghaire, County Dublin.

Office: (01) 284 1166

www.mentalhealthireland.ie information@mentalhealthireland.ie

Mental Health Ireland provides help to those who are mentally ill and promotes positive mental health.

Centre for the Prevention of Self-harm or Suicide

Pieta House, Old Lucan Road, Lucan, County Dublin.

Office / Helpline: (01) 601 0000

www.pieta.ie mary@pieta.ie

The Centre offers help for people thinking about suicide or self-harm.

Samaritans

Helpline: 1850 60 90 90

www.samaritans.org jo@samaritans.org

The Samaritans provide befriending 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to those passing through personal crisis.

Bodywhys

PO Box 105, Blackrock, County Dublin.

Office: (01) 283 5126 Lo-call Helpline: 1890 200 444

www.bodywhys.ie info@bodywhys.ie

alex@bodywhys.ie (Support)

(see website or call the office for helpline opening hours)

Bodywhys provides help, support and understanding for people affected by eating disorders.

Schizophrenia Ireland

38 Blessington Street, Dublin 7.

Office: (01) 860 1620

Helpline: 1890 621 631

(Monday-Friday, 9am-4pm)

www.sirl.ie info@sirl.ie

With regional offices in Dundalk, Kilkenny, Cork, Ennis, Galway and Longford.

Schizophrenia Ireland is dedicated to upholding the rights and addressing the needs of all those affected by enduring mental illness, including, but not exclusively, schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder and bipolar disorder.

Irish Advocacy Network

St Davnett's, Rooskey, Monaghan town, County Monaghan.
(047) 38 918

www.irishadvocacynetwork.com

admin@irishadvocacynetwork.com

Irish Advocacy Network offers peer advocacy, awareness training and family support in dealing with mental health difficulties.

Console

All Hallows College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9.

Office: (01) 857 4300 Helpline: 1800 201 890

www.console.ie info@console.ie

Providing support to those bereaved by suicide.

Living Links

McDonagh House, Dublin Road, Nenagh, County Tipperary.

Phone: 087 969 3021

www.livinglinks.ie

Trained volunteers offer confidential, practical support and advice to families who have experienced a death by suicide. The service is available in a number of counties.

Internet support

A number of support services are now using the internet to reach out to people. One useful Irish website that provides a signpost to these services and offers health information is: www.spunout.ie

Text messaging

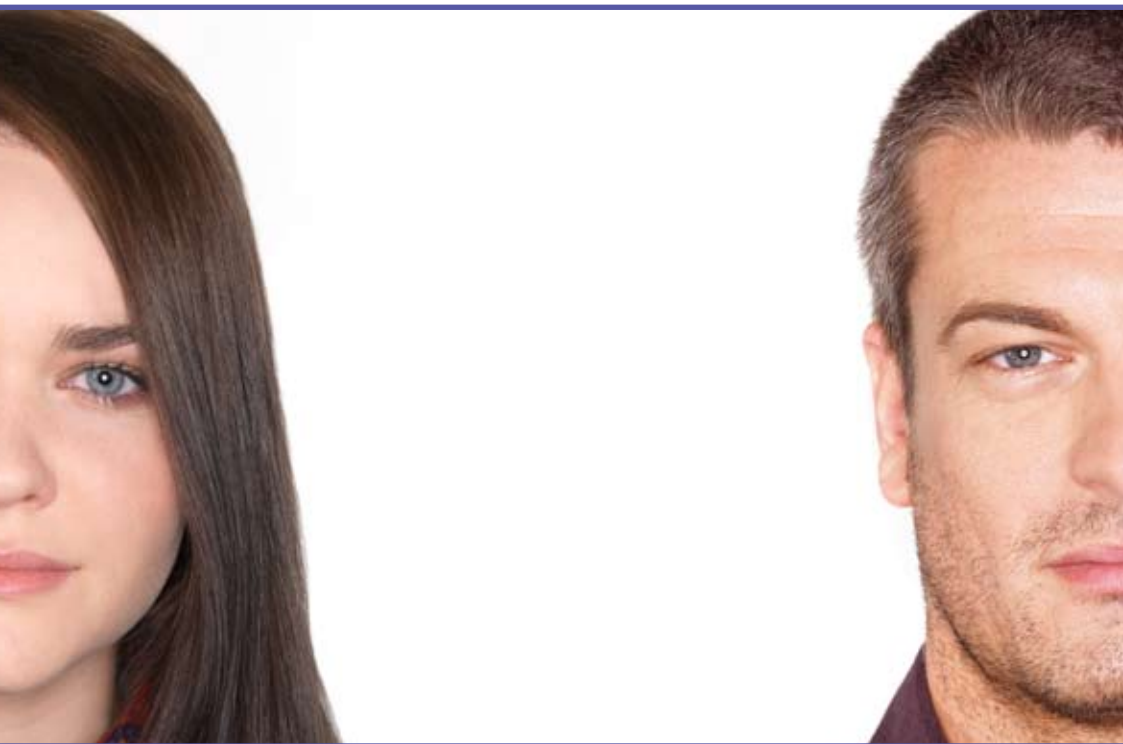
Information on where to go for help in a crisis is now available through your mobile phone. Text the word HeadsUp to 50424. The Headsup text service is co-ordinated by Rehab and sponsored by Meteor.

'Your Mental Health' Awareness Campaign Steering Group

The following people took part in the Steering Group for developing the 'Your Mental Health' awareness campaign.

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Catherine Brogan	HSE Mental Health
Derek Chambers	HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention
Aisling Culhane	Psychiatric Nurses Association
Dr Rachael Cullivan	Irish College of Psychiatrists
Dr John Connolly	Irish Association of Suicidology
Sinead Costello	National College of Ireland
Suzanne Costello	Samaritans
Brenda Crowley	HSE South
Geoff Day	HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention
Angela Dooley	National Service Users Executive
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Nikki Hennessy	Console
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Eddie Ryan	Athlone Institute of Technology
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