



Care Cards



Supporting a young person through a mental health crisis

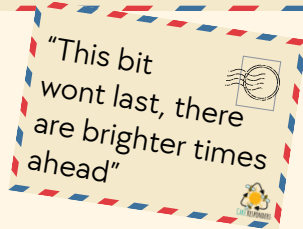
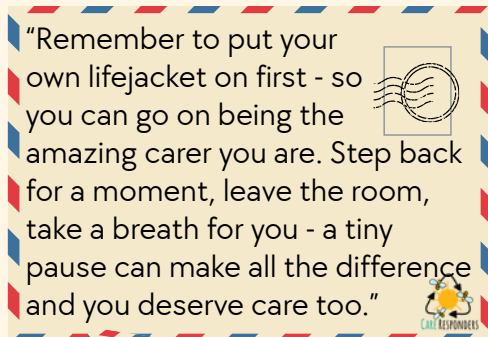
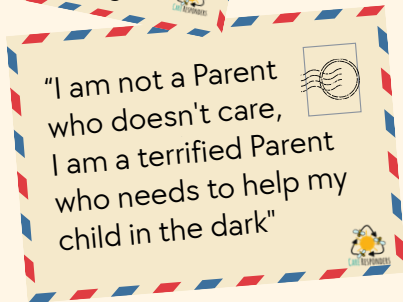
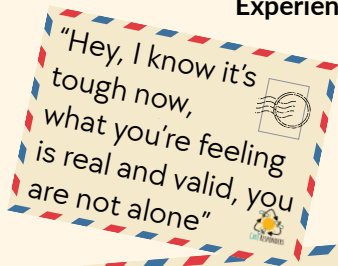
A pocket-sized toolkit of information, helpful tips, and calming activities to support you and your child when things feel difficult.

Use the cards on your own or together to better understand feelings, build coping skills, and support wellbeing.



Advice From Parents/Caregivers

These quotes were kindly shared by members of the Care Responders Lived Experience Parents-Caregivers Advisory Group.



Recognising the Signs

Remember: One sign alone may not indicate a mental health crisis. Look for changes that are unusual, persistent, or getting worse. If you are worried, seek advice from a mental health professional.

Talking about harm

Feeling helpless

Increased risk taking

Increased
substance
use

Putting
themselves
in danger

Withdrawing from
family and friends, or
spending more time
alone

Changes in:
Sleep patterns
Eating habits
Mood



CARE RESPONDERS

Understanding Feelings

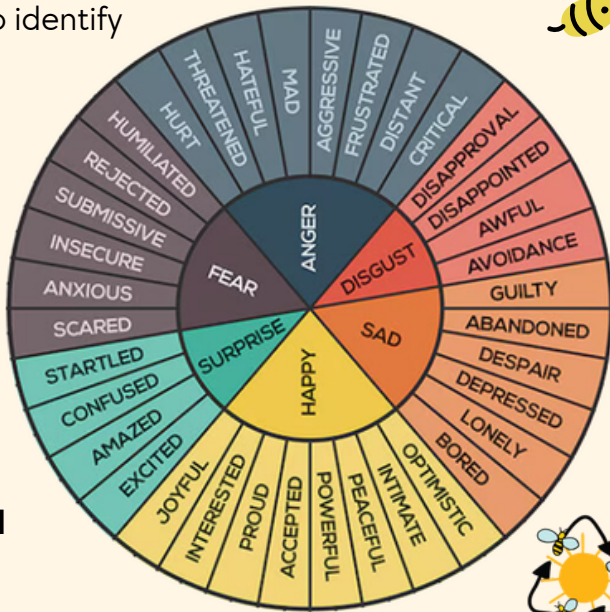


Young people can struggle to identify what they're feeling.

Try asking:

- Which **feeling** (centre) fits best?
- Which **emotions** (outer ring) fit best?
- What happened before this feeling appeared?

Try and name your own feelings/emotions as well



How to Be a Good Listener

Give the young person your **full attention**.

Use **open, calm body language** (sit at their level, keep your arms unfolded).

Listen without judgement and let them talk when they're ready.

Ask **open questions**, such as "Can you tell me more about that?"

Don't rush to fix things, sometimes they just want to feel heard.

Allow silence and give them time to think.

Ask how they would like you to **support them**.

Check in regularly and **take breaks** if needed. Support can happen over several conversations.

When They Are Not Ready to Talk

Be patient and keep showing that you're there for them.

Try talking at a **calm** time, or suggest a **different way to communicate**, such as texting or writing.

Remember they may be **worried** about being **misunderstood, judged**, or upsetting those close to them.



Remind them it's okay to talk to **another trusted person** in a different setting e.g. a **teacher or friend** at school.

If home feels difficult, **suggest talking somewhere** else such as in a park or open space.

You can't force someone to talk, but your **patience and support** can help them feel safe **when they're ready**.



Self-Harm

Self-harm can be a way of coping with emotional distress. It does not always mean someone wants to end their life, but it should be taken seriously.

Things to look out for:

- Unexplained injuries.
- Wearing long sleeves or trousers in warm weather.
- Withdrawal from family and friends.
- Changes in mood or behaviour.

What to do next:

- Stay calm and listen without judgement.
- Let them know you're glad they told you.
- Encourage them to access support.
- Call 999 if you're worried about their immediate safety.

Remind yourself:

- This is not your fault.
- You don't need to manage this alone.
- Behaviour is still communication.
- You don't need all the answers today.

Self-Harm – What to Do Next

If your child has hurt themselves, it's important to get support.

Self-harm is often a way of coping with overwhelming feelings, but they need to know that they do not have to deal with it alone.



Check for immediate medical needs:

If the injury is serious, call 111 or 999 for advice

Help them slow their breathing, this helps the body settle.



Listen to them and acknowledge their feelings:

You don't need to fully understand their behaviour to recognise that they may be struggling.

It's normal for them to feel scared, confused, or low after self-harming.

Avoid criticism, punishment, or assumptions.



Panic Attacks



If a Young Person Is Having a Panic Attack 🔍



- Stay calm and speak gently.
- Remind them they are safe and that the panic will pass.
- **Encourage slow, steady breathing with you.**
- Help them focus on the present by **noticing things they can see, hear or touch.**
- Give them space if needed but stay nearby and let them know you're there.
- **Avoid overwhelming them** with lots of questions.



Remember: Panic attacks can feel scary, but they are not dangerous. Stay calm and ask what support would help. If you're concerned about their immediate safety, call 999 or seek medical help.



Distressing Sensory Experiences

Sometimes young people hear voices or sounds that other people can't hear, see things that other people can't, or feel like someone or something is nearby. This can feel scary, but lots of young people experience this.

Believe them and stay calm:

Take what they say seriously. Avoid judgment and arguments about reality.

Direct them to a safe space:

Help them move to a quiet room or have them hold a comfort object.

Help them feel grounded:

Name 5 things you can both see, hear, and touch in the room.

Guide their breathing:

Talk them through a breathing technique.



What You Can Do to Support

Distressing voices or visions are usually messengers or signals pointing to underlying stress or difficult emotions.



Encourage safe outlets: Walking, drawing, scribbling, ripping paper, or punching a pillow can help release frustration.

Support healthy distractions: Headphones or a favourite video can provide temporary relief from overwhelming situations.



Be a detective together: When your child is completely calm, give them space to talk, write, or use a "worry box" so you can work together to decode the worries or problems hidden behind what the voices say.





After a Difficult Time

A mental health crisis can be tiring for both young people and their families. Once things have started to settle, it can be helpful to reflect on what happened and think about what may help in the future



Reflections:

- What helped?
- What made things harder?
- Were there any warning signs?
- What could we try next time?

Moving forward:



- Return to familiar routines
- Celebrate small wins
- Take things one day at a time
- Reach out for support if the young person or you are struggling

Looking After Yourself

Many parents feel guilt after a crisis. Guilt does not mean you are responsible

Caring for yourself helps you care for others

You did not cause your young person's difficulties

It's okay to ask for help - you don't need to have all the answers

Stay connected to others and talk to someone you trust

Take some time to rest and recharge

Progress is not a straight line





Mindfulness Exercises

Drawing: This allows you to focus on the present moment, express emotions creatively, and give your mind a break from overwhelming thoughts.



Puzzles: Challenging your mind can encourage focus and concentration on one task. This creates a healthy distraction and allows you to focus on a single task at a time.

Yoga: Practising yoga combines movement and breathing exercises to help increase body awareness and create a sense of calm.



Journaling: Writing things down can help clear your mind and explore your thoughts without judging them. Trying to do this regularly offers a way to feel more organised and aware of your needs.



Language Used in Mental Health

Risk assessment?

Discussing safety, worries, and support to reduce risks.

CAMHS?

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service

Inpatient?

Staying in hospital to get extra support

Support network?

People around you who care about you and can help

Discharged?

A service feels you no longer need their support

Safety plan?

Things we can do to help you stay safe

Healthy Minds?

Adult mental health services



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4-7-8 Breathing

4

Inhale through your nose for **4** seconds.

7

Hold your breath for **7** seconds.

8

Slowly **exhale** through your mouth for **8** seconds.



Repeat this process 3-4 times until you feel calmer.

*If holding your breath feels uncomfortable or makes you feel panicky, skip the hold and just focus on making your exhale longer than your inhale



Square Breathing

1

Breathe in through your nose for 4 counts.

2

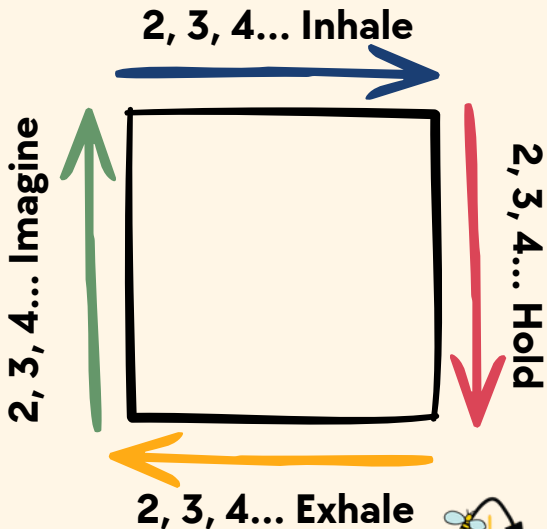
Hold your breath for 4 counts.

3

Breathe out through your mouth for 4 counts.

4

Imagine drawing a square with each step.





Grounding Technique

Sit with your child and try to name:

5

things you can **see** (like a chair, a tree, a phone)



4

things you can **touch** (like your clothes, your hair)



3

things you can **hear** (birds, a ticking clock, cars)



2

things you can **smell** (a flower, hand soap, fresh air)



1

thing you can **taste** in your mouth (water or food)



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Feedback



Help us make this resource better!

Please scan the QR code and tell us what you found helpful and what could be improved. Your feedback helps us make our materials more useful for children, young people, families and professionals.

