Support Guide for Teens

Ages 12 - 15

CARE RESPONDERS

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This guide was made by the Care Responders team. It's here to teach you some ways of supporting yourself if you're going through a tough time with your mental health. It also shows where you and/or your parent or carer can get support.



Feel free to give feedback on the support guide!

What's in the support guide?

1. **Immediate support**
2. **Understanding feelings and emotions**
3. **Breathing Exercises**
4. **Physical and sensory coping strategies**
5. **Mindfulness**
6. **Other activities and useful contacts**

"Reaching out for help is a sign of strength, not weakness. You are not alone."

- A member of the Care Responders Lived Experience Advisory Group



Immediate Support



If you/your child has taken an overdose or needs urgent medical help, call 999 or go to the nearest A&E department.

If you/your child has physical injuries such as cuts or burns, contact 111 or your GP for advice.

If you/your child need urgent mental health support or advice, phone our 111/option 2 or request an immediate GP appointment.

Understanding Feelings and Emotions

Feelings are your body's quick reactions to what's happening around you.

- You might feel tense during a stressful situation.
- You might feel relaxed in a safe or calm place.

Emotions are more complex. They are the words we use to explain how we feel, like happy, excited, angry, or frustrated. It can be hard to figure out your emotions, and that's okay, it gets easier with practice.

How can we tell what emotion we're feeling?

1

Notice your body:

Your body often reflects your emotions.

- Is your heart beating fast?
- Do you feel tired, shaky, or like there's a knot in your stomach?

2

Think about what's happening:

- Are you facing a problem or challenge?
- Did something positive happen, like someone saying something nice?

The Wheel of Emotions:

Emotions can feel like shades of colour. Think of basic feelings as the "primary colours" (like red or blue) and emotions as different shades (like pink or teal).
The wheel helps you connect a basic feeling in the centre to a more specific emotion in the outer rings.



IMPORTANT!

This wheel is just a guide. It doesn't cover every emotion or reflect how everyone feels, but it's a helpful tool to get started.

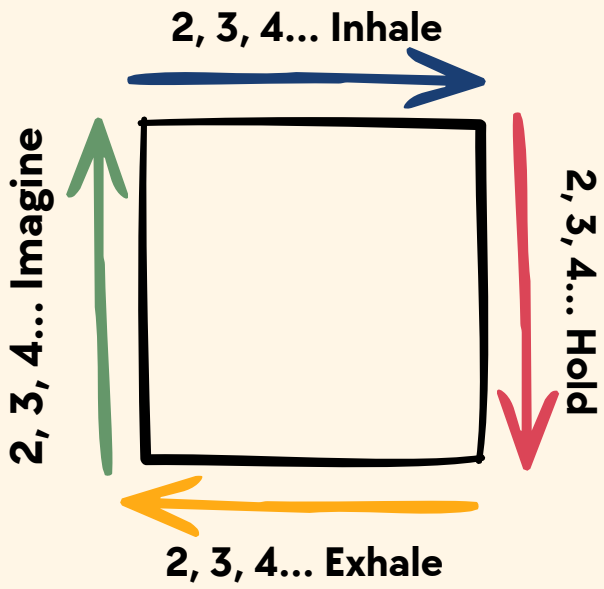
Understanding your emotions is the first step to managing them. The next section will guide you through practical coping strategies to help you handle those emotions and feel more in control.

Breathing Exercises

When emotions feel overwhelming, your breathing can become fast and shallow. **Taking slow, deep breaths can help calm your body**, slow your heart rate, and make difficult feelings feel more manageable.

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.



"I know it seems really hard right now and you feel so alone, but there are people out there who want to help and you don't have to go through this alone."

- A member of the Care Responders Lived Experience Advisory Group

Belly Breathing



1. Place one hand on your chest and the other on your belly.
2. Inhale deeply through your nose, letting your belly rise.
3. Exhale slowly through your mouth, feeling your belly fall.
4. Repeat for 5 minutes.

4-7-8 Breathing



- **Inhale** through your nose for **4** seconds.
- **Hold** your breath for **7** seconds.
- Slowly **exhale** through your mouth for **8** seconds.
- **Repeat** this process 3-4 times until you feel calmer.

Physical Coping Strategies

Physical coping strategies are activities that help you manage stress and intense emotions through movement. Actions such as taking deep breaths, going for a walk, or stretching can make you feel calmer and more in control.



Muscle Relaxation

Find a Comfy Spot:
Sit down or lie down somewhere you like.

1

Tighten and Relax:
Start with your toes. Squeeze them tight, and then let them relax.

2

Repeat:
Do the same with your legs, belly, hands, arms, shoulders, and face.

3

Breathe:
When you squeeze, breathe in. When you relax, breathe out.

4

Hand Tracing



- **Hold one hand open** like a star⭐
- Use a **finger** from your other hand to **trace** around it
- Keep going until you've traced **all 5 fingers**
- **Repeat**



Sensory Coping Strategies

When you're feeling upset, stressed, or overwhelmed, focusing on your senses can help you feel calmer and more grounded. Paying attention to what you can see, hear, touch, smell, and taste helps bring your focus back to the present and can make intense emotions feel more manageable.

Grounding Technique

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

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

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

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

1 thing you can **taste** in your mouth (take a sip of water) 

Or you could try...

- Rubbing your hands together really fast, like you're trying to warm them up. 
- Holding a small ice cube in your hand and moving it gently between your fingers. 

Mindfulness

Mindfulness helps you stay in the present moment, which can make stressful or anxious feelings easier to manage.

1. Sit in a quiet space where you won't be distracted.
2. Rest your hands on your lap or knees and sit up straight.
3. Close your eyes (if you feel comfortable to).
4. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.
5. Pay attention to how the air feels going in and out.
6. Check how your body feels. Try to relax areas with tension.
7. Feel your feet on the floor or your body in the chair.

8. If your mind wanders, gently bring it back to your breathing.

9. **Listen**: Focus on the sounds around you.

10. **Feel**: Notice what your skin touches, like the air or your clothes.

11. **Smell**: Observe any smells in the room, even subtle ones.

12. Imagine thoughts are clouds. Acknowledge them, then let go.

13. Practice this for 3-5 minutes or longer if you want.

14. Open your eyes and take a few deep breaths.

Focus on one thing at a time

Let's get through the next small step, not everything at once.

Imagine your thoughts are like:



Clouds in the sky



Messages popping up



Cars passing by

You can notice them without reacting to them

Other Activities to Try



Art or Drawing

Grab some paper and pencils and doodle or create something cool. You can even try digital art using apps like Procreate.



Sports or Games

Play basketball, football, or just toss a frisbee in the park with friends or family.



Journaling

Write about your day, your feelings, or things you're grateful for. You can also try creative writing and make up a story.



Photography

Use your phone or camera to take pictures of interesting things around you. You could even create a photo journal of things that make you happy.

"keep your head high and ask for support if you need it, there are people out there that can help!"

- A member of the Care Responders Lived Experience Advisory Group

My Safety Plan (Young People)

My name: _____
Date: _____
Who I made this plan with: _____

This plan is for times when things feel overwhelming or I don't feel safe. I can use it myself, and I can show it to someone else if talking feels difficult.

1. How I know things are getting difficult

Things I notice when my mental health is getting worse:

☐ My mood changes
☐ I withdraw from people
☐ I feel overwhelmed or unable to cope
☐ I stop doing things I normally enjoy
☐ My thoughts become more negative
☐ I feel like things won't get better
☐ I think about hurting myself or ending my life
☐ Other: _____

My early warning signs are:

_____

Things that tend to make things worse for me:

_____

2. Things I can do to help myself

When I notice my warning signs, I can try:

☐ Give myself some space
☐ Watch something familiar
☐ Do something creative
☐ Use breathing or grounding techniques
☐ Distract myself with something I enjoy
☐ Write down what I'm thinking or feeling
☐ Remind myself that the feeling will pass
☐ Other: _____
☐ Listen to music
☐ Go outside / get some fresh air
☐ Exercise or move around

The three things most likely to help me are:

_____

What might make it difficult to use these strategies, and what could help?

_____

My Safety Plan (Young People)

3. People I can turn to

Someone I trust and can talk to:

Name: _____ How I can contact them: _____

Another person I can contact:

Name: _____ How I can contact them: _____

A professional/team supporting me:

Name/team: _____ Contact: _____

If talking feels too difficult, I can:

□ Text/message someone □ Show them this plan

□ Use an agreed word, phrase or emoji □ Write it down

□ Ask someone else to tell them for me

□ Other: _____

4. If I am struggling to stay safe

If my distress is increasing or I feel I might hurt myself, I will:

1. Move somewhere where I am not alone.
2. Tell _____.
3. Use one of my coping strategies above.
4. Contact _____ if I still don't feel safe.
5. If I cannot keep myself safe, an adult/support person will help me access urgent professional help.

Things that can be made less accessible when I am struggling:

Any changes to the environment should be agreed with me wherever possible and should aim to be the least restrictive way of keeping me safe.

5. What helps other people support me

When I'm really distressed, it helps when people: _____

It doesn't help when people: _____

Something I want people to understand about me is: _____

My Safety Plan (Young People)

6. Things that matter to me

People I care about: _____

Things that are important to me: _____

Things I am looking forward to: _____

I want to get through difficult moments because:

_____

7. My support plan

Who will check in with me? _____

How often? _____

What should happen if things get worse? _____

When will we review this plan? _____

My important contacts

My mental health team: _____

GP: _____

Local crisis team: _____

Emergency: 999 / A&E if there is immediate danger or I cannot be kept safe

Support for Young People

- **Childline**: Call 0800 1111, send a message, chat online with a counsellor one-to-one, or visit www.childline.org.uk

- **Soluna by Kooth**: App and online mental wellbeing platform for young people. It is a free, safe space to access one-to-one support and content to support wellbeing, and connect with others.

- **BEAT Youthline**: Offers online chat and telephone support to young people struggling with an eating disorder – call 0808 801 0677 (open Monday to Friday, 3pm – 8pm). Visit https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/

- **The Proud Trust**: Supports LGBTQ+ young people through youth groups, mentoring, and online resources. Call 0161 660 3347 or visit www.theproudtrust.org

- **CAMHS**: If you are already being seen by CAMHS, call your CAMHS worker (Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm). Follow your safety plan (request a physical copy of this if you don't have one already). If you are open to CAMHS and don't have a Safety Plan, contact your case manager or the duty worker to create one.

Support for Everyone

- **YoungMinds Parents Helpline**: A free and confidential service for parents and caregivers concerned about a child or young person's mental health. Advisors offer emotional signposting and support. Call 0808 802 5544 (Mondays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 9.30am – 4pm, and Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 9.30am – 6pm). They also have a webchat service (Monday to Friday, 9.30am – 4pm).

- **Samaritans**: Call 116 123 for the Samaritans listening service for children, young people, and adults. Visit https://www.samaritans.org/

- **Mermaids**: Provides support for transgender, non-binary, and gender-diverse young people (up to 25 years old) and their families. Call 0808 801 0400 or use their webchat (Monday and Wednesday from 10.30am – 6pm, and Tuesday and Thursday from 1pm – 8.30pm). Visit www.mermaidsuk.org.uk.

- **FFLAG (Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)**: Offers support and information to LGBTQIA+ young people and their families. Call 0300 688 0368 (Wednesday and Thursday from 10am – 8pm, and Friday and Saturday from 10am – 6pm) or visit www.fflag.org.uk

- Call **NHS 111**, option 2. If you need urgent mental health support but it is not an emergency, call NHS 111 and select the mental health option (available in most areas). Trained professionals can help you access the right support.

- Call **999** for emergency help if there is an immediate risk to life, serious injury, or someone cannot keep themselves safe. You can also go to the nearest Accident & Emergency (A&E) department.