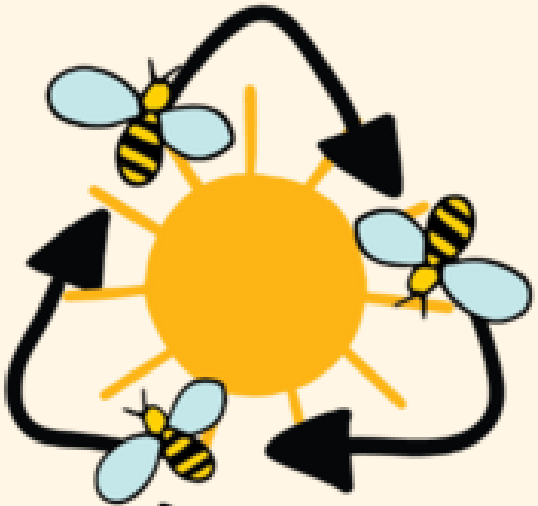
Support Guide for Parents-Caregivers



CARE RESPONDERS

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This guide has been created by the Care Responders team. The aim of the pack is to provide you with information about how to support your child if they experience mental health distress. It includes information about support available to you and your child.



Feel free to give feedback on the support guide!

What You Will Find in This Pack

1. Immediate support
2. What a mental health crisis can look like
3. Being a good listener
4. Looking after yourself and mindfulness
5. Creating a soothing box
6. Risk management
7. Signposting and safety planning



Immediate Support

If your child needs urgent medical attention, call 999 or go to your nearest A&E department. This includes:

- Taking an overdose or swallowing something harmful
- Loss of consciousness or being difficult to wake up
- Serious injuries or heavy bleeding
- Any other life-threatening medical emergency

If you are worried about your child's mental health and need advice or support, call NHS 111 and select option 2 for the 24/7 mental health line.

If your child has self-harmed or has physical injuries, contact NHS 111 for medical advice or speak to your GP Practice. Seek medical attention sooner if the injuries are deep, severe, or showing signs of infection.

Trust Your Instincts

You know your child best.

If you are seriously concerned about their safety, wellbeing, or mental health, seek help immediately. It is always okay to ask for support.

"I am not a parent who doesn't care, I am a terrified parent who needs to help my child in the dark"

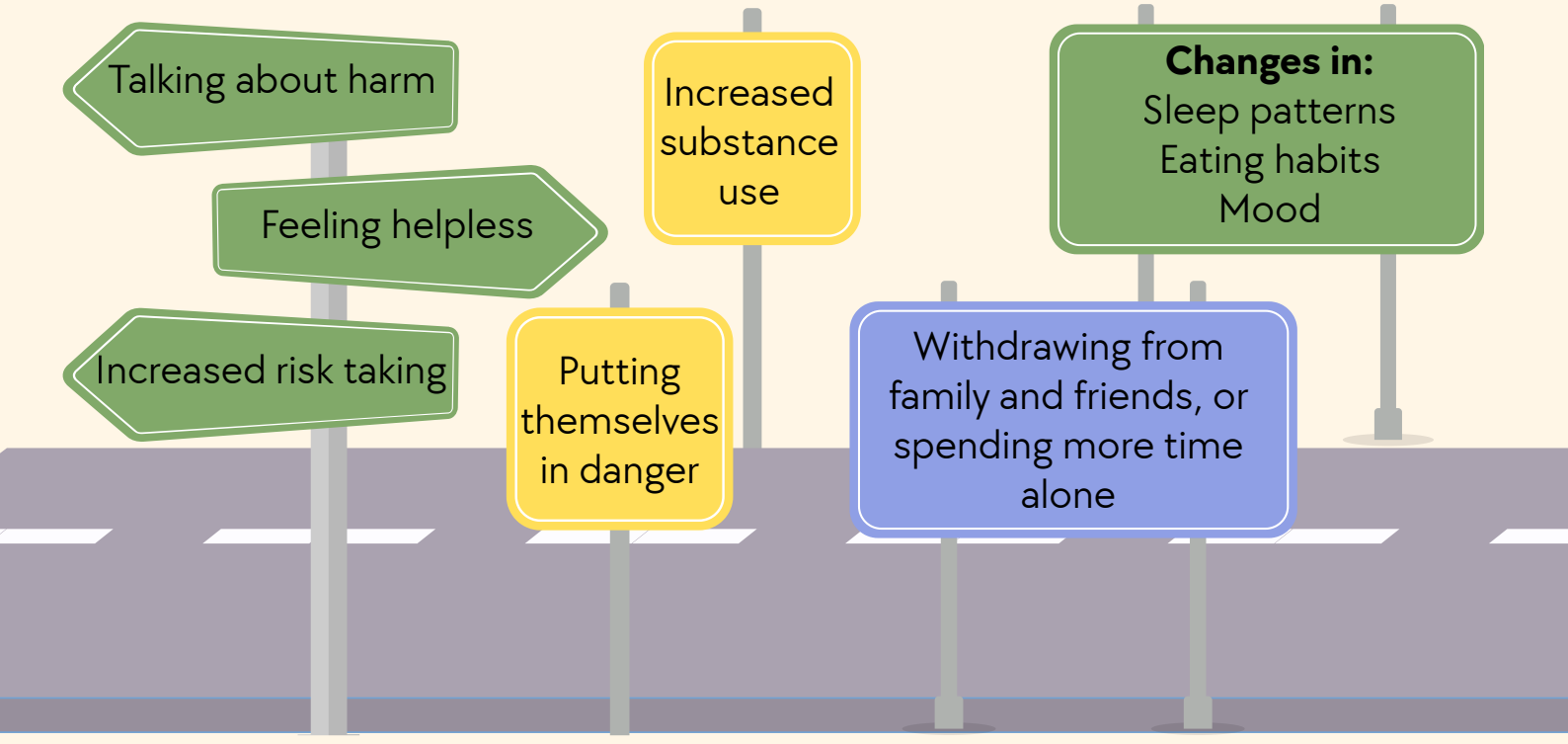
- A member of the Care Responders Lived Experience Advisory Group

What Can Mental Health Distress Look Like?

When your child is experiencing mental health difficulties, it can feel overwhelming and distressing. Mental health challenges can affect any child or young person, and reaching out for support is a positive and important step.

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.

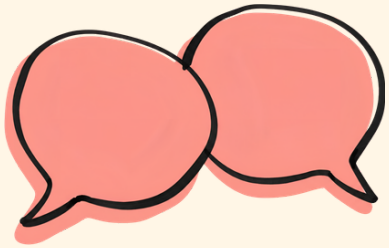


"I know you feel lost and don't have the answers but you'll get there. Keep going"

- A member of the Care Responders Lived Experience Advisory Group

Being a Good Listener

When your child is experiencing a mental health crisis, **it is natural to feel worried, overwhelmed, frustrated, or even blame yourself**. Try to remain as calm as possible, as your reassurance and presence can help your child feel safer. Remove any potentially harmful objects, listen without judgement, and encourage them to talk about how they are feeling. **Acknowledge and validate their experiences, even if you do not fully understand them**.



Communication Support

- 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.

"Hey, I know it's tough now, what you're feeling is real and valid, you are not alone"

- A member of the Care Responders Lived Experience Advisory Group

If They Aren't 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.

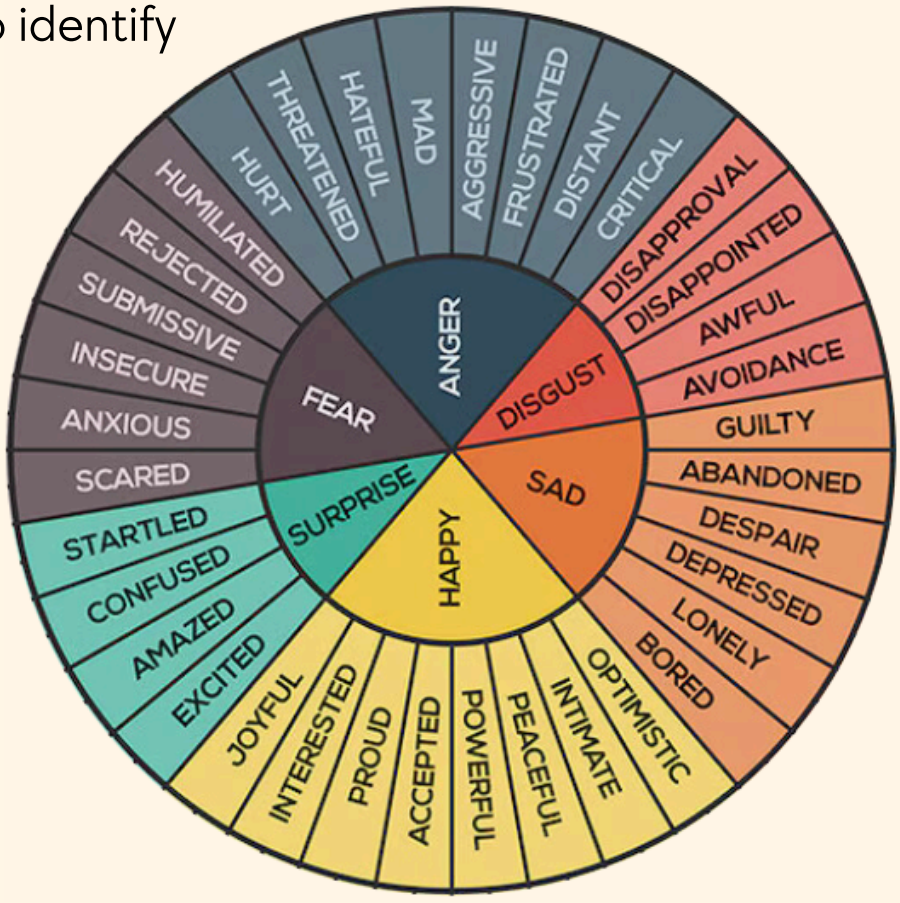
You can't force someone to talk, but your **patience and support** can help them feel safe **when they're ready**.

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



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 yourself is struggling

Looking After Yourself

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

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

Caring for yourself helps you care for others

Take some time to rest and recharge

You did not cause your young person's difficulties

Progress is not a straight line

"Remember to put your own lifejacket on first - so you can go on being the amazing carer you are."

- A member of the Care Responders Lived Experience Advisory Group

Mindfulness Exercises



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 thoughts without judging them. Trying to do this regularly offers a way to feel more organised and aware of your needs.

Grounding Technique

This technique encourages you to focus on your surroundings and brings your attention back to the present moment.

Sit alone or 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)

Coping Strategies for Your Child

There are additional coping strategies in your child's age-appropriate support pack. Encourage your child to try some of the suggested techniques, and where appropriate, support them to use these strategies. You may also find it helpful to try some of them yourself.

Sensory Soothing Box

When your child is struggling or feeling distressed, it can be difficult to think clearly and remember what might help. A self-soothe box can support your child to feel calmer and more settled, giving both of you the space to think more clearly about the situation and choose safer, healthier ways of coping.



What to include in a soothing box

You'll need a box, bag, or container to keep their helpful items in. What your child includes is entirely up to them. Many people find it helpful to choose items that engage different senses, alongside activities or objects that can provide distraction. When things feel overwhelming, focusing on a comforting activity or object can help calm the mind and make difficult feelings feel more manageable.

Sight



- Photos of people, pets, or happy memories
- Notes about positive experiences
- A letter to yourself written during a calmer or happier time
- Kind messages from friends, family, or other important people
- Positive quotes, affirmations, or meaningful song lyrics

Touch

- Fidget toyes (there are different types available, you could try different ones)
- Playdough or clay (or you could make your own salt dough)
- Something soft (a soft toy, blanket, or pair of fluffy socks)
- A hand, foot, or face mask



Sound

- Headphones
- A playlist of music that helps you feel calm, happy, or relaxed
- A link to a calming video, such as nature sounds or a seaside scene
- Ear defenders, if you find noise overwhelming
- A voice note from someone you trust



Smell

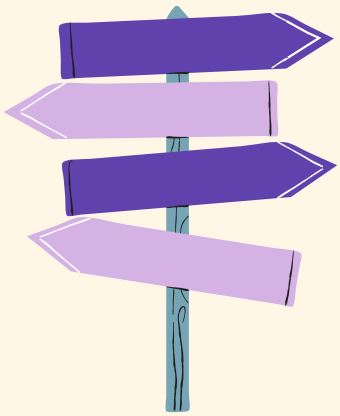
Different people find different scents calming. Try a scent that helps you feel relaxed.

- Hand cream or moisturiser
- Essential oils (check they're safe around pets)
- Room spray
- Perfume or cologne



Risk Management Strategies

Know the Signs: Try to notice changes in mood, behaviour, sleep, appetite, or daily activities that may suggest your child is struggling. Please remember that you may not always be able to and that's not your fault.



Education: Understanding mental health difficulties can help you feel more confident if your child needs support.

Identify Support Networks: Identify trusted people that both you and your child are able to speak to. This could be family members, friends, teachers, or professionals.



Regular Check-ins: Create opportunities for regular, open coversations about how your child is feeling. Listen without judgement and remind them that they don't have to cope alone.

Safety Planning: Work with your child and any involved professionals to develop a personalised safety plan. Include warning signs, coping strategies, trusted contacts, sources of support, and what to do in an emergency.

My Safety Plan (Younger Children)

My name: _____

Date: _____

Who helped me make this plan: _____

1. When I am starting to feel upset

Things I notice when I am not feeling OK:

☐ I feel worried ☐ I feel angry

☐ I feel sad ☐ I want to be on my own

☐ My body feels different ☐ I think about hurting myself

☐ Something else: _____

My warning signs are:

_____

2. Things I can try myself

When I notice these signs, I can try:

☐ Take some slow breaths ☐ Listen to music

☐ Draw, colour or make something ☐ Play a game

☐ Go somewhere calm ☐ Do something I enjoy

☐ Use something that helps me feel grounded

☐ Think about something that has helped before

☐ Something else: _____

The things that help me most are:

_____

3. Keeping me safe

When I am very upset, an adult will help me stay safe.

The adults who will help me are:

_____

Things that might not be safe for me when I am very upset:

_____

What my adults can do to help:

_____

My Safety Plan (Younger Children)

4. People who can help me

If I am still feeling upset, I can tell:

My first person: _____

How I can tell them: _____

Another person I can tell: _____

How I can tell them: _____

I can use these words: "I'm not feeling safe and I need some help."

I can also show someone this plan or use another way of communicating if talking feels difficult.

5. If things get worse

If I feel that I might hurt myself or cannot keep myself safe:

Step 1: Tell an adult straight away.

Step 2: Stay with a safe adult and go somewhere safe.

Step 3: My adult will contact:

If there is immediate danger or I cannot be kept safe: My adult will seek urgent emergency help (999/A&E).

6. Who and what I care about

People, pets, places or things that are important to me:

❤️ _____

⭐ _____

🌈 _____

Something I am looking forward to: _____

7. My plan

What I want adults to remember about helping me when I am upset:

The most helpful thing someone can say or do is: _____

The least helpful thing is: _____

My plan will be reviewed on: _____

My child-friendly safety plan should be kept: _____

_____

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

My Safety Plan (Cared For Young People)

My name: _____
Date: _____
Who I made this plan with: _____
This plan is for times when things feel really difficult. It helps me work out what I can do, who I can turn to and what I want adults to do to help me feel safe.

1. How I know I am struggling
Things I notice when I am beginning to feel overwhelmed:
☐ I feel angry or upset ☐ I feel worried or frightened
☐ I want to be on my own ☐ I stop talking to people
☐ I can't sleep or sleep much more ☐ I stop doing things I usually enjoy
☐ I think about hurting myself ☐ I feel like I can't keep myself safe
☐ My thoughts become difficult to manage
☐ Something else: _____
My warning signs are:_____
Things that can make things more difficult for me:
_____

2. Things I can do myself
When I notice that I am struggling, I can try:
☐ Listen to music ☐ Watch something familiar
☐ Draw, write or make something ☐ Play a game
☐ Go somewhere quiet ☐ Go outside
☐ Have a shower or bath ☐ Use breathing or grounding techniques
☐ Spend time with someone I trust
☐ Do something that usually makes me feel good
☐ Other: _____
The things that help me most are: _____

My Safety Plan (Cared For Young People)

3. The adults I can turn to

The adult I feel safest talking to:

Name: _____ Role: _____

Another adult I can talk to:

Name: _____ Role: _____

Someone at school/college I can talk to:

Name: _____

My social worker:

Name/contact: _____

My mental health worker/team:

Name/contact: _____

I don't have to deal with difficult feelings on my own. I can ask an adult to stay with me, even if I don't know what to say.

4. If I don't want to talk

Sometimes talking about how I feel can be difficult.

When I don't want to talk, I can:

☐ Show someone this plan ☐ Send a text/message

☐ Write it down ☐ Ask someone to sit with me

☐ Use a word or phrase that means "I need help"

☐ Use another way: _____

My word/phrase for "I need help" is:

5. What helps me feel safe

A place where I feel safe: _____

People I feel safe being with: _____

Things that help me feel calm: _____

Things adults can do that help: _____

Things adults should avoid because they make things worse:

_____

My Safety Plan (Cared For Young People)

6. When I don't feel safe

If I feel that I might hurt myself or cannot keep myself safe:

1. I will tell _____.
2. I will stay with a safe adult rather than being on my own.
3. The adult supporting me will follow my agreed care/crisis plan and contact:
4. If I cannot be kept safe, the adult will seek urgent professional help. In an emergency: 999 / A&E

7. My care team will help me

The adults responsible for my care know about this plan:

☐ Foster carer
☐ Residential care staff
☐ Social worker
☐ Personal adviser
☐ Advocate
☐ School/college
☐ Mental health team
☐ Other: _____

Who will check in with me after I have been struggling? _____

What I would like them to do: _____

8. People and things that matter to me

People who matter to me: _____

Friends or other people I trust: _____

Places where I feel I belong: _____

Things that are important to me: _____

Something I am looking forward to: _____

9. What I want adults to remember

When I am really struggling, please remember: _____

The most helpful thing you can do is: _____

The least helpful thing you can do is: _____

My plan will be reviewed on: _____

With: _____

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.

Remember, it's okay to seek help. Taking care of your child's mental health is a journey with ups and downs. Celebrate small victories and progress. Your love and support are crucial in helping your child through this time.

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.