Care Cards

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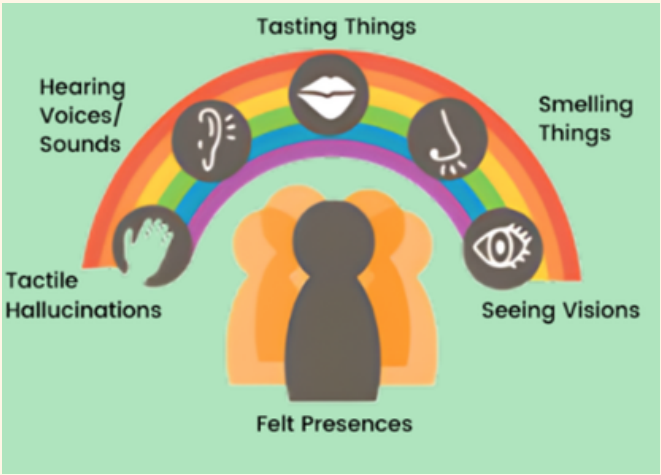
For mental health professionals to use

A pocket-sized toolkit of information, practical tips, and calming activities to help you support a young person, understand their feelings, manage difficult moments, and promote their wellbeing.

Young People's Mental Health Research Centre
NHS Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust
NHS Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
NHS Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust
NHS Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust
NHS Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust
MANCHESTER 1824 The University of Manchester
Lancaster University
University of Oxford
Greater Manchester Police
FUNDED BY NIHR National Institute for Health and Care Research
IRAS: 332304, NIHR 158509

Distressing Sensory Experiences

Distressing sensory experiences can happen in **different ways.**



You might not hear, see or experience the same thing as the young person does.

That doesn't mean the experience isn't real, or distressing for them.

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How to Support

- **Reduce stimulation.** Move away from noise/crowds/turn down lights
- **Offer reassurance.** Let them know they aren't alone and you are here to help
- **Give them time**. They might need longer to process and respond
- **Stay calm.** They are probably frightened and worried about your judgement
- **Listen.** Give them time to explain if they want to
- **Don't dismiss their experiences.** Don't tell them it isn't real just because you aren't experiencing the same thing



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Feelings Wheel

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?

Sometimes it can be helpful to name your own feelings/emotions as well



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Emotions Temperature



Try asking:

- Which **colour** are you feeling right now?
- **What** can you **feel** in your body? (hot, cold, heart rate, tickly tummy)
- **Where** can you feel it in your body?

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Panic Attacks

Panic attacks can be **really frightening and overwhelming** for young people. They can happen suddenly and the young person may not understand what is going on. They might find it difficult to explain but have an overwhelming **sense of fear and danger.**



Difficulty breathing

Shouting or screaming



Struggling to speak



Dizziness or feeling faint



Chest pain



Sweating



Increased heart rate



Trembling or shaking

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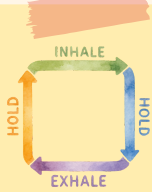
Panic Attacks

Things that can help:



Box breathing



Progressive muscle relaxation

Biting a lemon



Grounding



Noticing senses



Cold water

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Self Harm

Seeing a young person self-harm can be difficult. It might bring up feelings of shock, frustration, worry, sadness, helplessness. These reactions are understandable.

What can help:

- Focus on making them **safe first**
- Stay calm and listen, **without judgement**
- Avoid focussing on blame
- The priority is to help them feel **safe, supported and less alone**

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Alternatives to Self Harm

When the immediate situation is safe, it might help to explore alternative ways to manage self-harm urges with the young person.

You could suggest:



Holding or rubbing ice cubes



Drawing or colouring



Snapping an elastic band on their wrist



Popping bubble wrap



Stomping your feet



Listening to music

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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

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Finger Breathing

Finger breathing is a simple grounding exercise that can help young people slow their breath and begin to feel calmer.

Tracing each finger while breathing can give them something simple to focus on.

- Try it with them. Doing this together can make them feel less alone.



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Language Matters

The words we use can make a big difference when a young person is distressed.

Using **calm, simple, non-judgemental language** can help them feel **understood and less alone.**



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5, 4, 3, 2, 1 Grounding

Bringing attention back to the present moment can help reduce feelings of panic and anxiety, allowing young people to regain a sense of control and safety.

Try and look for:

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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Progressive 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, hands, arms, shoulders, and face.

3

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

4

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Personalised Safety Plan

Warning signs

- What do I feel in my body?
- What thoughts do I have?
- What do I do?

Safe places and people

- Where can I go?
- Who feels safe?
- Who helps when I'm
- struggling?

Coping

- What helps me to
- feel better?

Other things to help

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Feedback

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