

# What do we know about mental health?



**EBPU**  
Evidence Based  
Practice Unit

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Mental health is about our feelings, our thinking, our emotions and our moods.

We all have feelings that come and go every day. Sometimes the feelings can be quite strong but they don't stay around for a long time. These feelings are quite normal.

## What is mental health?

For some people, these negative feelings can be really intense at times. They can last for a long time – at least several months. And they can stop us doing what we want in our lives or stop us enjoying life. These kinds of feelings might be described as mental health difficulties.

However you feel, you are not alone.

Help and support is available for young people who are experiencing mental health difficulties.



# How common are mental health difficulties?

In the last 18 years there has been a gradual increase in mental health difficulties in young people.<sup>2</sup>

Research tells us that most people (up to 83%) will experience a mental health difficulty at some point during their lives.<sup>1</sup>

In 2004  
**1 in 10 children  
and young people**  
had mental health  
difficulties.

In 2017  
this increased to  
**1 in 8 children  
and young people**

In 2021  
**1 in 6 children  
and young people**  
had mental health  
difficulties



In surveys of young people across the country, one in six young people now report having mental health difficulties.

Usually, these difficulties won't last. Short-term difficulties are much more common than long-term difficulties.



# Facing challenges and things that can help

Young people go through lots of changes in their lives including some which are difficult. Some challenges that young people face make it more likely that they will experience mental health difficulties.<sup>3</sup>



Positive experiences and support can help reduce the likelihood of experiencing mental health difficulties.



Research shows that young people who experience a lot of distress when they are growing up are more likely to experience mental health difficulties.



This support could come from lots of different places. It might be from family members or having friends you can rely on. It could also be support from school or from people in your community.

Other things like money problems, family conflict, family health issues, discrimination and bullying might make it more likely that a young person will experience a mental health difficulty.



The more of these kinds of difficulties people face in their lives, the more likely they are to experience a mental health difficulty.



The more support young people have, the less likely they are to struggle with their mental health. Having support doesn't always make the difficulties go away but it can help young people to cope.<sup>4</sup>



# Positive signs for the future

It is a huge challenge to properly support young people's mental health. Yet lots of things are happening that we hope will help:

School staff are learning more about mental health and know how to support you to get help.

There are more support services in schools, such as counsellors and spaces to take time out.

Lots of people who work closely with young people are getting mental health training.

There is more focus on helping young people early to stop mental health difficulties increasing.

More young people have a say about what help and support they need.

We have hope that all of these will make it easier for young people to get treatment and support when they need it.



# Coping during difficult times

These are some things that young people have said they find helpful in coping during challenging times:

- doing activities they enjoy
- talking to someone they trust
- using techniques to manage emotions or to feel calmer

It is always a good idea to ask for help if you feel low or worried.



For more information about what helps young people cope with their mental health, visit **How I cope: a young person's guide** and the **self-care pages of On My Mind**. For more information about mental health, advice and support try these sites:

- **YoungMinds** offer advice, information and support.
- **On My Mind** is a great place to find out more about mental health, support and self-care activities.

# If you need help right now

If you or someone you know needs help right now talk to a parent or carer or a trusted adult like your GP.

These organisations also offer confidential 24-hour support by text, email and phone:

- Text **AFC Crisis Messenger** if you are in a mental health crisis and need support. Text AFC to **85258**.
- Call **Childline** for free on 0800 1111 or [chat online](#).
- Call **Samaritans** for free on 116 123 or visit their [website](#).
- Visit the **Anna Freud Centre's urgent help** page.
- If you're concerned that your life or the life of someone else is in danger, call 999.





# Where does this information come from?

The information in this briefing is all from research evidence. To find out more, use the links below:

1. Schaefer, JD., et al. (2017) Enduring mental health: Prevalence and prediction. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*. 126(2), 212-224.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/abn0000232>
2. NHS Digital (2021) *Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2021 - wave 2 follow up to the 2017 survey*. Government Statistical Service.  
<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2020-wave-1-follow-up>
3. Deighton, J., et al. (2019). Prevalence of mental health problems in schools: Poverty and other risk factors among 28 000 adolescents in England. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 215(3), 565-567.  
<https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.2019.19>
4. Stapley, E., et al. (2020). *Shining a light on risk and protective factors: Young people's experiences*. Evidence Based Practice Unit.  
[https://www.ucl.ac.uk/evidence-based-practice-unit/sites/evidence-based-practice-unit/files/evidence\\_briefing\\_6\\_january\\_2020.pdf](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/evidence-based-practice-unit/sites/evidence-based-practice-unit/files/evidence_briefing_6_january_2020.pdf)



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# About EBP

The Evidence Based Practice Unit is a child and youth mental health research and innovation unit based at UCL Faculty of Brain Sciences and the Anna Freud Centre. Founded in 2006, this collaboration bridges cutting-edge research and innovative practice in children's mental health. We conduct research, develop tools, provide training, evaluate interventions and disseminate evidence across four themes: Risk | Resilience | Change | Choice

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