

# Let's talk mental health



Find out more about mental health and how to take care of yourself and your friends.

From families and schools to social media and the whole of society, mental health is everyone's business.

It's time to talk about mental health

This booklet draws on findings from the *South African Child Gauge* – a book published by the Children's Institute, University of Cape Town in partnership with UNICEF South Africa – to track progress for South Africa's children. The 2022 issue focused on mental health. [www.ci.uct.ac.za](http://www.ci.uct.ac.za)

## What is mental health?

- Mental health is about the way we think, feel and act.
- It affects our relationships and our ability to focus and follow our dreams.
- Learning about mental health can help us express how we feel and connect more deeply with our friends. It can also help us cope with life's challenges and ask for help when we need it.



## Why mental health matters?

- **Did you know:** more than 1 in 10 young South Africans are struggling with their mental health? Yet most suffer in silence and don't reach out to get help.
- If we care about our own mental health and that of our friends and families, then we need to break the silence and find ways to talk about our problems and share how we really feel.



## Feeling <sup>up</sup> | Feeling <sup>down</sup>

- We all have good days and bad days. Most days feel somewhere in between.
- At some point we all have to deal with stressful situations – like starting a new school, writing exams, going on a first date, or losing someone we love.
- But with a bit of help, we can find a way through these challenges, and come through **feeling stronger**.



## Risk and protective factors

**Did you know:** mental health is not just in your head? How we think, feel and act is also shaped by the world around us. So we need to find ways to limit the risks and strengthen things that protect us from harm.



## Feeling under **pressure**

- If you're feeling anxious or depressed, know that **you are not alone**.
- There are so many challenges we are facing at the moment across the world – from violence in our communities, to not having enough money, to worrying about climate change, to being bullied at school. So, it's not surprising we feel stressed.
- That's why we need to find ways to address the root causes of poor mental health and build a more caring society.



## We need to make **Mental health everybody's business**



Families, schools, health workers and the whole of society need to work together to support young people's mental health. Together we can create a healthy, safe and supportive environment where all young people can thrive and reach their full potential.

## JUST START It's never too late to

- **Did you know:** Our early experiences can have a lifelong impact on our mental health.
- It's important to focus on a child's mental health as early as possible, right from birth and through to adolescence. It's never too late to start investing in your mental health.



## The **AMAZING** teenage brain



- When we are teenagers, our brains develop really fast - laying down new information pathways and becoming **more focused**. The more we practice things the faster and stronger those pathways become.
- This means it's a great time to **learn new skills** and develop your talents! Think about your hopes and dreams for the future and invest your time and energy in the things you love.

## Stressed out

We all react to stress in different ways. Some people show their stress on the outside and become aggressive or get into trouble. Others turn inward and feel anxious or depressed. You may get headaches, stomach aches, or feel your heart racing. Or you may lose your appetite or struggle to sleep and focus in class.

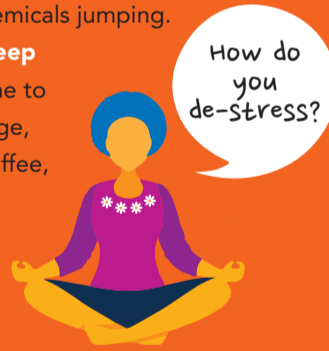
So, if you see any of your friends suddenly acting out or going silent, it can help to ask is anything wrong.



## Self-care

Here are some ideas to help you de-stress.

- ★ **Relax**  
Take some time out. Go for a walk. Listen to music. Lie in the sun. Breathe deeply for 5 seconds, hold it in, then breathe it out for 10 seconds. Repeat 10 times.
- ★ **Exercise**  
Dance. Run. Move your body to release all that stuck energy and emotion. Get all those good chemicals jumping.
- ★ **Get enough sleep**  
so you have time to rest and recharge,
- ★ **Cut back** on coffee, fizzy drinks and social media.



## Know when to ask for help

- We all feel sad, angry or anxious at some point in our lives. But when these feelings carry on for a long time, or start to interfere with our school, friends and family life. It's time to reach out for help.
- Choose someone who you trust and feel safe with. It could be a friend, teacher or family member – and tell them how you feel.
- Sometimes just sharing our problem can be a huge relief. Why not give it a try.



## Signs you may need help

- Feeling sad or hopeless all the time
- Feeling angry all the time
- Feeling anxious all the time
- Feeling numb or unable to feel anything
- Getting into lots of fights and arguments
- Feeling worthless
- Extreme mood swings – the highs and lows
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Starving yourself, or overeating
- Losing interest in things you enjoy
- Avoiding friends and family
- Hurting yourself on purpose
- Experiencing nightmares or scary thoughts
- Using drugs, alcohol or social media to feel okay
- Sudden changes in behaviour, like a quiet person behaving wildly, or the other way around.

## Get the help you need

- If you – or someone you care about – are struggling, **don't wait** until things get worse. Reach out and ask for help.
- Ask your teacher, doctor or school counsellor about how to access support services in your community.
- **Call childline on 116** – their counsellors are there to listen and support you 24/7 and whatever you share is **confidential**.



## Helping a friend

- Most times when we ask a friend: How are you? They say I'm fine, even when we know they're not. So, try saying: I'm worried about you. What's going on?
- Being there for your friends and listening to them when they need to talk is a great way to show care and support.
- Remember you're not a social worker. If you and your friend are taking strain, ask a caring adult for support.

