

Safeguarding Bulletin – Mental Health Awareness Week

This year for Mental Health Awareness Week the focus is on anxiety. We all feel anxious from time to time. Anxiety is a natural response to the uncertain world around us. For example, in the current [cost-of-living crisis](#), more than a third of [adults feel anxious about their financial situation](#). But it's important that we recognise and respond when we feel anxious, so that our anxiety doesn't become overwhelming.

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We've chosen anxiety as the Mental Health Awareness Week theme this year to kickstart a nationwide conversation, encouraging people to share their own experiences and any helpful ideas on how they manage anxiety.

Alexa Knight - Director of England at the Mental Health Foundation

What is anxiety?

Anxiety can affect us physically and mentally. If you are feeling anxious, you might notice your heart rate increasing, headaches, loss of appetite, breathlessness or chest pain. (If you are experiencing these symptoms, you should see a healthcare professional to rule out another physical cause). Anxiety might make you feel tense or nervous, find it hard to relax, feel tearful or have problems sleeping and concentrating. Friends or family might notice you are more irritable than usual, or more withdrawn. Or perhaps you seem fine on the outside but feel panicky inside.

Help is at hand. There are things that we can all do to protect our mental health and manage anxiety.

What works will be different from person to person. Things that might be helpful include being active, getting out in nature, practising breathing techniques, getting support to tackle money worries or eating well. Talking to a friend, or spending time with loved ones, is often a good first step.

What can we do to cope with feelings of anxiety?

1. Focus on your breathing

When you're having anxious thoughts try focusing on your breathing, concentrating on the feeling of your body as you breathe in and out. It can help you control the thought.

4-7-8 breathing technique

Close your mouth and quietly breath in through your nose, counting to four in your head. Hold your breath and count to seven. Breathe out through your mouth, making a whoosh sound while counting to eight. Repeat three more times for a total of four breath cycles.

Some people find relaxation exercises work too, while others find **mindfulness** useful.



2. Get moving

Exercise is a good way of dealing with anxiety. Remember, activity doesn't have to be vigorous; try some gentle stretches, yoga, or seated exercises. Or just go for a walk. Going for a run, swimming, or taking part in a fitness

class can give you something else to think about. It needs a bit of concentration, so takes your mind of the anxious thoughts. Any amount of exercise will help. Read more about **how exercise can help improve our mental health.**

3. Keep a diary

It's important that we don't try to ignore our worries. Taking the time to keep a record of what's happening in your life and how it's affecting you can help you understand what is triggering your feelings of anxiety. Knowing this can help you better prepare for and manage situations that may cause anxiety.

Sometimes it helps to give yourself a certain time of day to be your 'worry time'. It could be half an hour first thing in the morning for to sit with your worries and write them down in your diary. When that's out of the way, you can move on with the rest of your day. This can help you take control and stop anxiety getting in the way of what you want to do.



4. Challenge your thoughts

Anxiety can lead us to think about things over and over again in our brain. This is called 'rumination' and it's not helpful. When you catch yourself ruminating try to write down the thought and to challenge it. Is what you're worrying about likely to happen? Are you being realistic? Have you had similar thoughts which have not turned into reality? This can make it easier to challenge the thoughts and stop them from overwhelming you.

5. Get support for money worries

A common cause of anxiety is money. If you're worried about not being able to pay bills, are struggling to repay debt, or aren't sure if you can cover your family's living costs, seek help. Make sure you are claiming all the government supports that you're entitled to. You can also speak to an organisation such as Citizens Advice or StepChange.

Check out our advice on **how to cope with cost-of-living pressures** and **information on where to get practical support.**



6. Spend time in nature

We know that spending time in nature has a positive impact on our mental health. It can help us feel calmer and less stressed. This can be as simple as tending some flowers in a window box or going for a walk in the woods. Any amount of time doing this is good for us, but to really get the benefit, try to spend a significant period of time – maybe an hour or longer – when you can really connect with nature and immerse yourself. **Find out more about the benefits of nature.**

7. Connect with people and talk about how you feel

Anxiety can feel very lonely. Connecting with other people can help a lot. Spend time with friends or meet other people through activities such as volunteering, sport or social clubs, or peer support groups. If you're able to talk to people about how you feel, it can help to reduce your anxiety. Sometimes saying what's worrying you out loud can take away its power over you.

8. Try to get some quality sleep or rest

Resting and having a good night's sleep is hard when your head is full of worries but there are some things that can help.

If anxious thoughts keep you awake, write them down in your diary. If sleep is still not coming, get up and have a drink (nothing with caffeine!) and wait until you're feeling more tired before going back to bed.

Keeping a note in your diary of your sleep patterns, what time you went to bed, what you ate, how often you woke up etc can help you work out a routine that will help you get better quality sleep.



9. Try to eat a healthy diet

For many of us, feeling anxious might cause us to reach for sugary snacks, junk food or alcohol.

It's important that we don't turn to unhealthy foods or drinks as a way to cope as they will do more damage in the longer term. Similarly, we should avoid smoking or taking recreational drugs.

Eating healthy food regularly helps us to regulate our blood sugar and gives us the energy we need to live well. Remember caffeine in coffee, tea and fizzy drinks can affect your mood and cause sleep problems so it's best to have these in moderation and not too close to bedtime. **Find out more about how your diet is linked to good mental health.**

Other coping mechanisms:

One coping mechanism is the benefits of **music**. We all know the joy of listening to or playing a wonderful piece of music or song but there news articles that encourage you to look further into how music can really benefit our mental health and emotional well-being.

It doesn't matter if you love metal, pop or EDM, music can help your mood and help you cope with (or even take control of) tricky emotions.

Expression: The next time you're finding it hard to talk about or express your emotions, try turning to music for help. Creating your own music – whether simply

strumming a guitar or composing lyrics to a song – can help you express and process your emotions. It's more about how it makes you feel, than how it sounds. Remember that no one ever has to hear your music if you don't want them to.

Social connection: Music can stop you from feeling lonely or isolated. Whether its sharing playlists with your friends, or meeting new, like-minded people at your favourite band's next gig, music connects people.

Creativity: Did you know that listening to music allowed your brain to think creatively? So, whether it's a creative project you need to complete, or some new ways to improve your mood, try some different types of music and see what works for you.

Relaxation: Okay, so this isn't a huge scientific breakthrough, but it's worth repeating: music helps you to relax. If you choose the right kind of music, change into some comfy clothes and put your feet up, it's a safe bet that you'll feel relaxed in no time.

Motivation: You need to vacuum the house/study/get some exercise, but you just can't get off the couch? Use your favourite music as a motivational force. Crank up the volume on a killer tune and chances are you'll find it that much easier to get started.

Look on Facebook and Twitter and follow @YoungMindsUK to get hints and tips regularly



YoungMinds

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For anyone feeling anxious in social situations:

“Understanding our emotions can uncover deep-rooted beliefs we weren't aware of. This can be a painful process however it is incredibly helpful in the long run. It can help us to understand and process our feelings more easily and enable us to meet ourselves with compassion when we have strong reactions to things. This, in turn, can help us to cope better day-to-day and generally be kinder to ourselves.”



How to support a child experiencing anxiety:

Don't put pressure on them to do more than they feel comfortable with. Try to be as patient as you can and listen to their wishes. If they are forced into situations before they feel comfortable this can make their anxiety worse.

If a child is having a panic attack, getting them outside, talking to them calmly or doing breathing exercises with them can help.

Find out as much as you can about anxiety. This can help you understand what they are going through.

Ask about their experience. Ask it feel for them on a day to day basis, what makes it better or worse. Listening to them helps you empathise with them.

Some specific support for anxiety:

Anxiety UK

Anxiety UK was established in 1970 and is run by and for those with anxiety, offering an extensive range of support services designed to help support those affected by anxiety disorders, anxiety and anxiety-based depression.

Services available include:

Helpline services - 03444 775 774, open from 9:30am to 17:30pm Mon to Friday, along with a text service 07537 416905 and 'Ask Anxia' chatbot service, available 24/7 for all anxiety queries at anxietyuk.org.uk. See **Helpline services** for more information.

Anxiety UK also offer fast access to a range of psychological therapy services, including counselling, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT), clinical hypnotherapy & Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy, with appointments available in person, online and by telephone. See **Therapy services** for more information.

They also run a range of courses and groups including a popular Art for Anxiety Relief (AfAR) course, anxiety management courses, and online peer-led anxiety support groups. See **Support Groups** for more information.

- Infoline 0300 123 3393 (Mon-Fri 9am-6pm)
- Youngmind's Crisis messenger text YM to 85258
- Link to the Mind website - [Looking after your wellbeing | Mind, the mental health charity - help for mental health problems](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/looking-after-your-wellbeing/)
- Anxiety, fear and panic support from the NHS - <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/anxiety-fear-panic/>
- Anxiety Self-help guide - <https://mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/resources/anxiety-self-help-guide/>
- Some other coping strategies to help with anxiety - <https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/how-to-cope-with-anxiety#long-term-strategies>

Papyrus

PAPYRUS is the national charity dedicated to the prevention of young suicide. They provide a confidential support and advice service for:

- Children and Young People under the age of 35 who are experiencing thoughts of suicide.
- Anyone concerned that a young person could be thinking about suicide.

Telephone: 0800 068 4141/ 078 6003 9967

Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org

Website: www.papyrus-uk.org

Useful places to go for information for your son/daughter:

Samaritans: 116 123 www.samaritans.org

Childline 0800 1111

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/>

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>

<https://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/>

<https://www.kooth.com/>



Recognising your feelings

Recognising your feelings is the first step towards understanding them and learning how to cope with them.

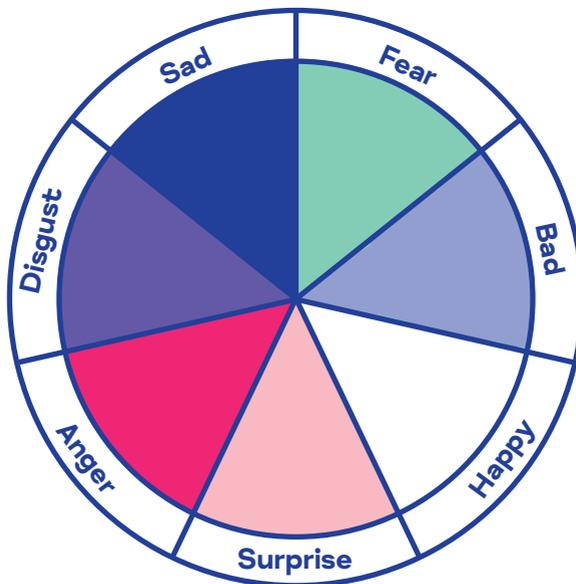
It might feel difficult to recognise your feelings at first, but with time and practice, it will start to feel easier.

Activity 1:

This image shows six of the main emotions: fear, anger, disgust, sadness, happiness and surprise. We've also included bad as young people told us that emotion resonates with them.

Do any of these emotions describe how you're feeling right now or how you've felt this past week?

Circle or put a mark next to those emotions.



Activity 2:

This image explores the seven emotions in more detail.

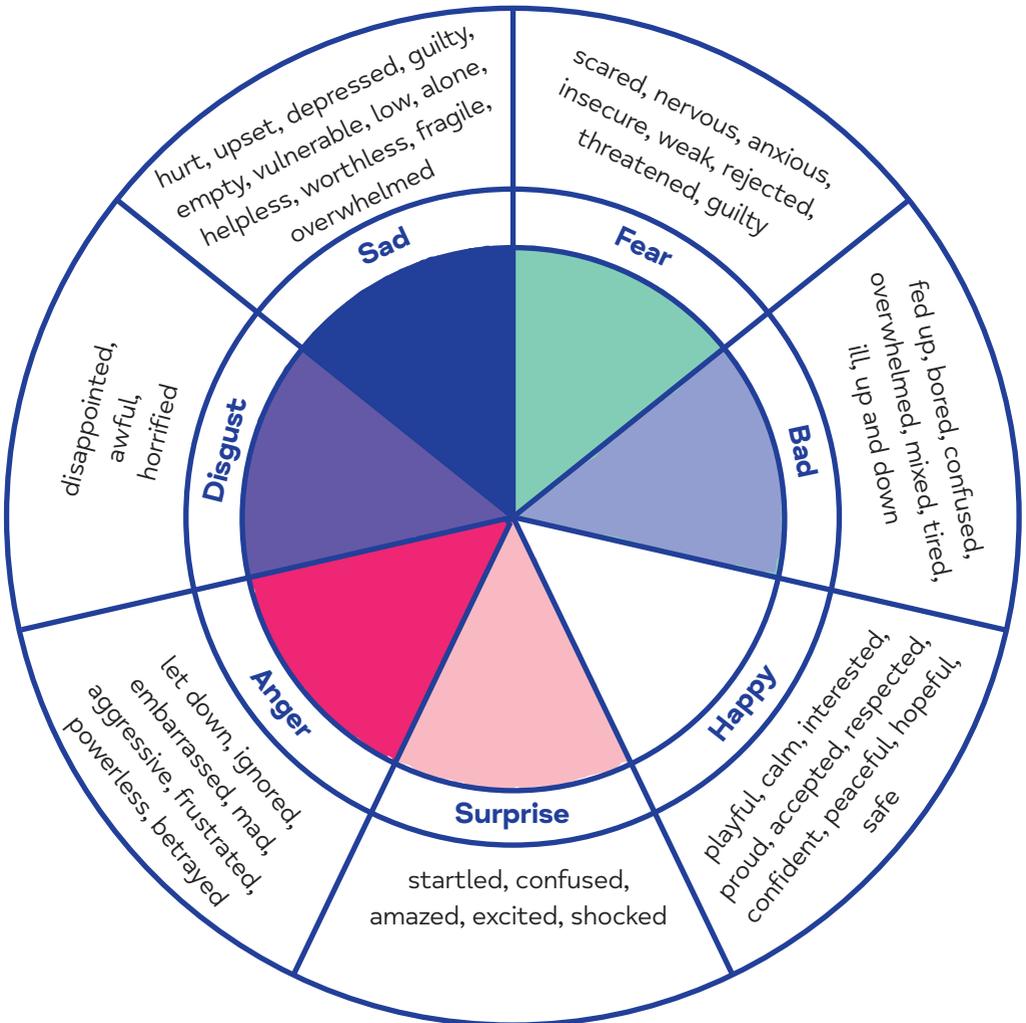
Do the emotions on this wheel describe how you're feeling?

Can you use them to put into words what you're experiencing?

I'm feeling.....

I have felt like this for (how long).....

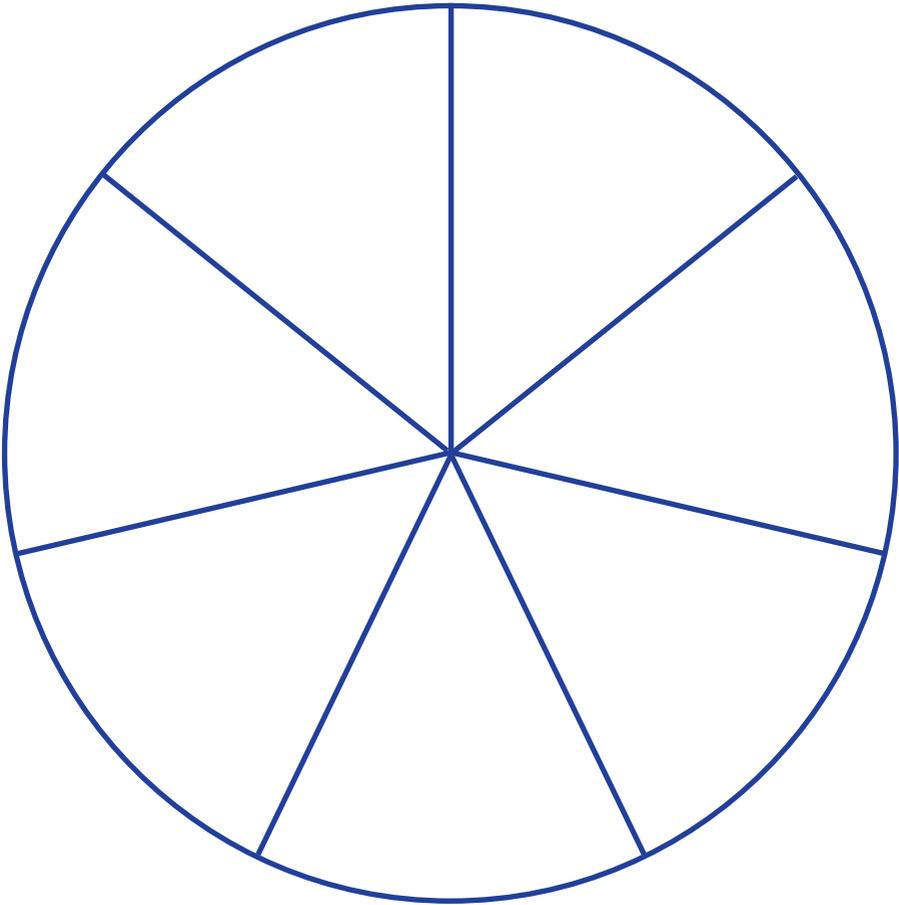
I might feel like this because.....



Activity 3:

This image shows a blank emotions wheel.

Using the space in the diagram, write down the six main emotions you're feeling right now, or that you've felt this past week. These could be positive or negative emotions, or both.



Activity 4:

If you're able to name what you're feeling, can you describe what this looks and feels like for you?

Here are some examples to get you started:

Sad Not talking to friends or family,
not sleeping well and feeling tearful

Angry Clenching your hands or teeth,
shaking, sweating and feeling upset

Worthless Thinking negative thoughts about yourself,
not talking to friends and family, feeling very low
and exhausted

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Remember: If you're struggling with your feelings or emotions, it's always okay to ask for help.

Go to mind.org.uk/youngpeople



 @mindcharity

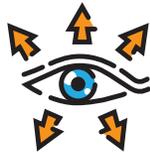
 @mindcharity

Grounding Techniques Menu

Unwanted thoughts, memories, and emotions can pull you away from the present moment. Psychologists sometimes call this 'dissociation' and it is very common, especially in people who have experienced trauma. Grounding techniques are a way of bringing your attention back to the present moment, where you are safe.

Come back to your senses

Using your senses of sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste is a quick and powerful way of bringing your attention back to the moment at hand.



- **5-4-3-2-1 technique:** name 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can touch, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste.
- **Water:** splash your face with cold water, run water over your hands, or have a bath or shower.
- **Smells:** smell a strong smell (e.g., chewing gum, essential oils).
- **Grounding object:** carry an object with pleasing sensory properties (e.g., a smooth pebble, a beaded bracelet).

Distract yourself

Dissociation and unwanted thoughts can be persistent. If your mind keeps going to unhelpful places, use distraction to gently bring it back to the present.



- **Nature:** go for a walk outside; watch the clouds; feel the wind on your face.
- **Other people:** call someone; go somewhere else; talk about something different; go 'people watching'.
- **Watch & read:** watch a funny video; read a book.
- **Listen:** use music or a podcast to change your mood.
- **Slow down:** walk somewhere slowly and mindfully, concentrate on each step.

Remind yourself that you are safe

Unwanted memories from the past can make you feel unsafe. Remind yourself that you are safe now.



- **Proof:** carry something that proves you survived (e.g. a photo of something good that has happened since your trauma).
- **Letter:** write a letter reminding yourself of why you are safe now, and carry it with you.
- **Coping statements:** "I survived", "This too shall pass", "This is just a memory", "I am safe now".
- **Then vs. now:** focus on what's different now compared to the time of your trauma.

Offer yourself compassion

You're already feeling bad, so there is no point in making things worse by criticizing yourself. Try offering yourself kindness instead.



- **Be understanding:** "It's no wonder you're feeling frightened because you have just had unwanted memories of the past. You are safe now."
- **Be kind:** what would you say and how you would act towards someone else who was suffering like this?

Use your body

If you feel distressed, you can use your body to help you to come back to the present moment.



- **Change position:** stand up if you were sitting down.
- **Exercise:** do some star jumps, go for a run, or swim.
- **Stretch your body:** reach up and try to touch the sky with your fingertips, then bend down and try to touch the ground.
- **Dance:** move your body to your favourite song.
- **Ground yourself:** press your feet into the floor and literally 'ground' yourself.
- **Hands or feet:** curl your fingers or toes, then release them.

Calm yourself physically

Your body and mind are connected. Use physical soothing techniques to help you to relax.



- **Breathing:** try a relaxed breathing exercise to calm yourself by slowing and deepening your breathing.
- **Muscles:** try a progressive muscle relaxation exercise to calm yourself and release tension, clench and release your fists, allowing tension to drain away as you release.
- **Yoga:** practice yoga or stretching.
- **Exercise:** use physical exercise to release pent-up energy.
- **Connection:** ask someone for a hug, give yourself a butterfly hug, or stroke a pet.

Orient yourself

Dissociation can make you forget *where* and *when* you are. Use grounding to orient yourself in space and time.



- **In space:** remind yourself of *where* you are right now.
- **In time:** remind yourself of *when* it is right now.
- **Relative to your trauma:** remind yourself of where you are now, and how it is different to where and when your trauma happened; remind yourself of what has happened since your trauma happened.

Use your imagination

Your mind can respond to imagined 'things' as powerfully as it does the 'real thing'. Regular practice of the exercises below can help when you need it.



- **Safe place:** do a 'calm place' or 'safe place' exercise, where you imagine being in a soothing place.
- **Compassionate other:** try a 'compassionate other' exercise, where you imagine being in the presence of a perfectly compassionate being who accepts you without judgment.
- **Positive memories:** deliberately think about happier times, places where you felt safe, or people you felt safe with.

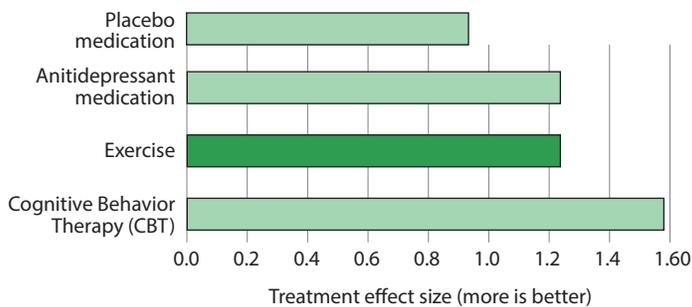
Exercise For Mental Health

Exercise can be a powerful tool for managing your mood. It can help you to cope with mental health struggles. Understanding how it can help and how to get started may give you the motivational drive to get moving.

Exercise has a profound impact on cognitive abilities and mental health. It is simply one of the best treatments we have for most psychiatric problems.

– John Ratey, M.D.

What does the research say?



Exercise, CBT, and medication are evidence-based treatments for anxiety and depression with comparably similar effects.

Unlike CBT and medication, exercise can be done without medical supervision and has a cascade of other physical health benefits.

What does exercise do for your mental health?



Gets you out of your mind and into your body. Exercise can help to shift your awareness away from unwanted thoughts or worries. This can help you to feel better by not dwelling so much on your negative thought patterns.



Increases your body's natural feel good chemicals. Hormones such as endorphins and neurotransmitters such as endocannabinoids are released during exercise which will improve your mood.



Helps you sleep better. Exercise, particularly in the morning or afternoon, can help improve your sleep. Poor sleep is a common factor in many mental health conditions and improving your sleep can greatly improve the way you feel.



Leads to greater self-esteem. With a sense of achievement comes greater self-confidence and self-esteem. Exercise can also increase your sense of self-control, your ability to withstand challenges, and your body-confidence.



Gives you more energy. Regular exercise will increase your energy levels and therefore you will be able to enjoy more of the things you love doing. The more you do the greater your energy capacity.

How can I get started?

Pick an exercise you would like to try and then pick a time in your day where you can do it, and stick to it. Identify potential barriers to exercising and strategize ways to overcome them.

What type of exercise is best? Whatever you enjoy doing! Research suggests that moderate intensity exercise is best, and all types of exercise are effective.

How much exercise do I need to do? Evidence from research seems to show that: some exercise is much better than none, and 3-4 times per week is likely optimal.

Exercises you might like to try:

- Going for a run or walk around your local park, swimming, cycling, yoga, martial arts, boxing, weightlifting, dancing, gymnastics, pilates, football, rugby, hockey.
- Exercise does not need to be structured or formal, you could try walking instead of driving for short journeys, taking the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator, gardening, or even cleaning the house.

Getting ready to open up about your mental health – for 11-18 year olds

Information for 11-18 year olds on how to open up about your mental health, with tips on how to feel prepared and know what to say.

i Mae'r dudalen hon hefyd [ar gael yn Gymraeg](#). This link will take you to a Welsh translation of this page.

This page covers:

- [Preparing to open up](#)
- [What should I say?](#)

i This information is for you if you're ready to open up and need some tips and advice.

If you're thinking about opening up, see our page on [opening up about my mental health](#) for more information.

Preparing to open up

If you're worried about telling someone how you feel, it can help to feel prepared. You might also want to think about [what you want to say](#). Here are some things you could think about:

Find a way that feels right for you

You might want to talk face-to-face, but this might feel too difficult or not be possible. You could also try:

- Talking on the phone
- Talking over a video-call
- Sending a voice note

If you don't want to speak, or don't feel like talking to anyone right now, that's okay. There are other ways you can express how you're feeling to someone you trust. You could try:

- Sending them a text or email
- Writing them a letter
- Drawing or painting a picture to show how you feel
- Sending them information about how you feel, like a TikTok or YouTube video

“I personally find it easier to tell people about how I'm feeling via text as it feels less daunting to me. It also allows the other person to read what I have to say multiple times so they understand it better.”

Find a good time

The time may never feel perfect, but it's best if you both feel comfortable and ready to talk. You might want to choose a time when you're both free and won't be interrupted.

If you decide to speak to someone face-to-face, **choose a place where you feel comfortable**. You might find it helps you to speak to them while doing something together, like going for a walk or watching TV.

If you don't feel ready to open up to someone in person, **take your time writing things down or putting together a text**. Make a start when you feel comfortable and can think things through. You might want to come back to it at another time or read it through a couple of times first.

Think about if you want someone else involved

You might want another friend or family member to help you if you think it's too much on your own. You could talk to them about how you want to open up or ask them to help you write your feelings down. Or you might want someone else to talk for you, like asking a teacher to talk to your parents or carers about how you're feeling.

Practise what you want to say

This could be in your head or with someone else. You could even try writing things down or leaving yourself a voice note.

You can also use some of our [conversation starters](#) below to help you with what to say.

Plan what you're okay with sharing

There might be certain things you don't want to share, or aren't ready to share yet. **Only share what you feel comfortable with right now**.

Remember that it might be a lot for someone to take in at first and they may need some time to process what you've told them. They might not need or want to hear every detail now, but in time, you might be able to open up to them more.

If you decide to open up to someone but don't get the reaction you want, remember, it's not your fault. See our guide on [opening up](#) for advice on [what to do if they don't understand](#).

Think about where you're sharing

If you're talking to someone online or on social media, it's important to stay safe.

Think about what you feel comfortable sharing and what you want to keep private. [Childline](#) offer some information on how to do this. They also have online message boards for young people so you can get support from others.

If you choose to use message boards or other social media apps to talk to other people, **try to use sites that have been created for people your age**. It's also a good idea to use sites where messages are reviewed and monitored to help keep you safe.

Think about what can help you cope

If you feel overwhelmed, it might help to do some breathing exercises. Try to breathe in through your nose for four counts, hold it for two counts, and breathe out through your mouth for seven counts. If you repeat this, it can slow your breath and help keep you calm.

You could also play with a fidget toy or look at an image that makes you feel calm.

Make a plan to take care of yourself afterwards

Opening up can be difficult and tiring. You could think of something nice to do afterwards, like watching your favourite TV show or going for a walk. You can find more ideas on our [looking after your wellbeing](#) page.



“The best advice I could offer is just being as honest and open as possible. The more honest you are, the more they know and the more they can try to help – Lily, 16”

What should I say?

It can be really hard to tell or show someone how you're feeling. Here are some tips that might help:

Think about how to start

If you want to have a conversation with someone about how you feel, knowing how to start can help you to feel more confident.

We have some conversation starters below to give you some ideas:

Conversation starters

There's no perfect way to start but if you're finding it difficult, you could start by saying:

- “This is difficult for me to talk about, but I need to tell you something.”
- “I've got some things on my mind, can we talk sometime?”
- “I've been feeling _____ lately, and I'm trying to tell you about it because _____.”
- “I've been worried about _____ recently and wondered if I could talk to you about it?”
- “I've been finding it hard to cope with _____ at the moment. Can we talk about it later?”
- “I know it might look like things are okay, but they're not and I want to talk to you about it.”

You might find it helps to ask the person you're telling to wait until you have finished talking to respond.

It may be a shock for them to hear how you've been feeling. They may find it upsetting or a lot to take in at first. But you should feel proud of yourself for taking the first step.

“Because this one person reacted negatively doesn't mean everyone will. This also doesn't mean that you don't deserve the support you need.”

Explain how you've been feeling and how it impacts your life

This could be things like your eating, sleep and how you've been feeling at school, college or work.

Try finding useful information or examples

You might have seen something on TV, online or in a book that feels similar to what you're experiencing. You could show this to them to help explain how you're feeling.

For example, you could say “Have you been watching the TV series about...”, or “What do you think about the character who is experiencing...”

If someone else you know has been going through something similar, you might want to talk about them first to help explain how you feel.

Suggest things they could do to help

This could be helping you find information or talking to your school, college or workplace. It could also be making a doctor's appointment for you or just being there to listen and support you.

Tell them things that might not help

You might want to ask them to still treat you the same way, or not talk about how you feel when you're with other people.

“The first time I opened up to someone about my mental health, I regret not conveying what I wanted from them. It would have been easier for me to say, ‘Can I see a doctor about this?’ rather than waiting for them to suggest it.”

i Not everyone wants to open up in the same way. You might need to:

- **Write down your questions** and thoughts for them before you start
- **Ask them to give you time** to explain how you're feeling before they respond
- **Ask them to be clear and direct** with any questions they might have
- **Be prepared to repeat yourself** if they don't understand you straight away
- **Find a space where you won't feel distracted**. This might mean turning down the lights or going somewhere quiet

See our guide on [opening up](#) if you need advice on who to open up to and what to do if you don't have anyone to talk to.

“Opening up is one of the bravest things you can do, and I wish it was more normal.”

Was this page useful?

Yes

No

This information was published in 2023. We will revise it in 2026.

References are available on request. If you would like to reproduce any of this information, see [our page on permissions and licensing](#).



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INTRODUCTION TO MENTAL HEALTH



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