

MENTAL HEALTH

This fact sheet has been written by parent carers for parent carers



Life brings many additional challenges for our children, not only because they may feel acutely aware that their disability makes them 'different' to their peers but also because they may be more vulnerable to some mental health conditions because of their disability. Some children with autism, for example, can be more likely to develop conditions such as anxiety, depression, or obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). And for other children and young people, mental health issues will be their main area of need.

Adolescence in particular can be a challenging time. The physical changes of puberty are accompanied by psychological changes that can affect young people's behaviour and emotional wellbeing. And the social pressures that all teenagers face can be more acute for children with disabilities, which can lead to fragile self-esteem and higher anxiety.

Many children who are having difficulties with their mental wellbeing find it hard to talk about even to adults they trust. It's also important to remember that mental health issues can sometimes be harder to recognise in children and young people with disabilities. This might be because of communication difficulties, the complexity of their condition or the fact that some mental health symptoms may be confused with their other symptoms.

Signs that something may be wrong

It's natural for us all to go through difficult patches where we may feel more anxious, stressed or down. Often, we can get through these times without needing outside help or support, as long as we are fairly resilient and our self-esteem is in good shape (for more on this see our fact sheet on *Self-esteem*). If you notice that your child is having difficulties, it may be that talking to you, or a trusted friend of the family will be enough to help to resolve them.

However, sometimes a problem can be harder to resolve and it may be that your child will need the help and support of people outside the family. You may notice, for example that your child is more anxious, or is becoming isolated and withdrawn from friends and family. Their sleep may be affected and you may also notice that their personal hygiene is neglected. Similarly, you may notice changes in their behaviour. They may be more irritable and may possibly harm themselves or others.

If your child has a learning disability, it may be harder to ascertain what is going on. You may just feel that something is 'off'; that there has been a change in the way that they communicate, their behaviour has changed, that they are sleeping more or less, or they are no longer enjoying their favourite activities. It's important to trust your instincts and speak to professionals involved with your child if you have concerns.

Getting outside help

The first step when you notice a problem with your child or young person is to speak to other people who know them well or work with them regularly. It's a good idea to note down everything that you are worried about so that you can raise all of your concerns when you talk to professionals.

If your child is still in education, speak to their school or college about your concerns and they may be able to arrange support such as counselling. Or you could speak to their GP or paediatrician or contact your local community mental health and/or wellbeing team who may be able to arrange or refer you to short term therapeutic interventions such as online counselling or group work.

If your child needs more specialist support, they should be referred to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).



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CAMHS help with a wide range of mental health problems for children and young people. CAMHS workers are based in the community or in clinics and include practitioners such as therapists and psychiatrists. If your child has a sudden or serious mental health crisis they will be treated urgently. All other referrals to CAMHS should get an initial assessment quite quickly, but you may wait some time for whatever treatment is considered appropriate.

You can also get support, information and advice from local and national charities (see further reading).

Ask about

- **Amaze SENDIASS** - offers information, advice and support on anything to do with a child or young person's special educational need or disability including mental health issues. Call **01273 772289** or email helpline@amazesussex.org.uk
- **Brighton & Hove Wellbeing Service** - front door to all mental health and wellbeing services in Brighton & Hove. Visit www.brightonandhovewellbeing.org or call **0300 002 0060**.
- **CAMHS (Children & Adolescent Mental Health Service)** – Routine referrals should be made via the Brighton & Hove Community Wellbeing Service (see above). If children already known to the service are in danger of immediate harm or showing extreme psychotic symptoms, you may contact CAMHS Urgent Help Service. Find out more at: www.brightonandhovewellbeing.org/specialist-camhs
- **CAMHS Learning Disability Team** – specialist psychological, emotional and behavioural support for children with a learning disability and their families. Anyone can contact the CAMHS LD team for information or a referral on: **01273 718680**.
- **e-wellbeing** - weekly online counselling for young people aged 13-25. Complete the online referral form at www.bit.ly/2IAWXdr or contact Brighton & Hove Wellbeing Service (see above)
- **Mind Brighton & Hove** – for their mental health advice and information service call: **01273 666950** or email: info@mindcharity.co.uk.
- **Teen to Adult Personal Advisers** - TAPAS support 14-25 year olds with mental health issues who may not have been able to access mainstream services. You can call **07738 758373** or email: tapa@sussexpartnership.nhs.uk or attend one of their drop-ins at the Youth Advice Centre, Brighton on Tuesdays from 3 to 5pm.

Further reading and useful links

- **Find get give** - online directory of mental health support services that work with 13-25 year olds in Brighton & Hove and beyond. Visit www.findgetgive.com
- **Childline** - extensive info and advice on issues relating to child safety and mental health. Call: 0800 1111 or visit www.childline.org.uk
- **Mental Health Foundation** – www.mentalhealth.org.uk
- **Mind** – www.mind.org.uk
- **Right Here Brighton and Hove** – online resources and projects that support 11-25 year old's mental health. Call: **01273 222584** or visit: www.right-here-brightonandhove.org.uk.
- **Amaze resources** - you can find lots of advice and support on mental health issues for parent carers and young people on Amaze's website at www.amazesussex.org.uk
- **Young Minds** – wide range of information and resources for young people with mental health issues at: www.youngminds.org.uk. Also runs a parent carer helpline on: **0808 802 5544**.

