



# Understanding and managing stress and anxiety

A guide for young people

[samh.org.uk](https://samh.org.uk)

**SAMH**  
Scottish Action for Mental Health



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## **We all have mental health**

Mental health is just like physical health. Everybody has it and we need to take care of it.

Stress and anxiety are part of mental health and both are normal. However, too much stress and anxiety is common in young people and can sometimes feel overwhelming.

This leaflet introduces you to stress and anxiety, what it means for young people in particular and how to manage this.

## What is stress?



**Stress is when we feel worried, nervous or anxious about something.**

**Just like we all have mental health, we all experience stress daily - it is normal.**

Stress is like an internal warning signal. It lets our mind and body know that something important, uncomfortable, or even unsafe is happening that we need to respond to. In this way stress helps protect us from dangers, like crossing a busy road.



### Did you know, some stress and pressure is helpful?

- Stress can help us get out of bed in the morning, so we're not late for school.
- It helps us get things done on time so we don't miss deadlines.
- Stress can boost our energy and help us run faster in a race.
- It also helps during exams by making our brains more alert.

Too much stress however can be unhelpful, leading to young people feeling overwhelmed and anxious.



## What is anxiety?



**Anxiety and stress are linked.**

**Anxiety is when we feel worried, nervous or scared, even for no reason.**

It is like our mind and body are getting ready to deal with something stressful, even when we're not in stressful situations.

Everyone feels anxious sometimes, but too much anxiety can impact us greatly. It can stop us going about our lives and even doing the things that we used to enjoy doing.

This leaflet is about finding out how to manage stress and anxiety and stop it from becoming a problem.



# What causes stress and anxiety in young people?

## It can be hard being a young person!

We have to deal with a lot of issues that cause stress and anxiety:

Studies, exams & school pressures

Challenges with family & friends

Peer pressure & bullying

Understanding self identity

Managing relationships

Thinking about the future

Worrying about others

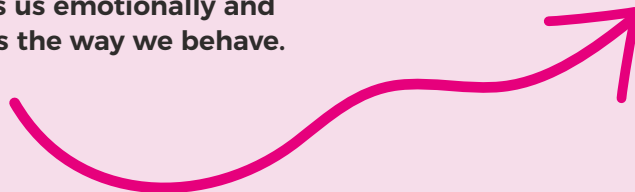
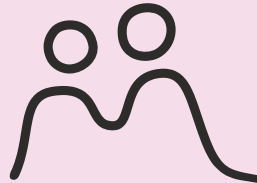
Big life changes e.g. moving house or school

Managing a positive body image

Managing social media

There might be one big thing that causes us stress or anxiety, or it could be lots of little different things. When lots of things are happening at once it can make it harder to know what exactly it is that is making us feel stressed, or to explain this to other people.

**We all experience stress or anxiety in different ways. It affects us emotionally and physically. It also affects the way we behave.**



# How does stress and anxiety affect us?

**Stress and anxiety impacts on our thoughts and feelings, physical body, and behaviours which can affect how we go about living our life.**

These physical body symptoms can sometimes make us feel like we're physically unwell. Often that is not the case and it's just our internal warning system telling us that we are stressed or anxious.

*Thoughts & Feelings*

- irritable, impatient or angry
- nervous, on edge or scared
- racing thoughts that can't switch off
- thinking the worst has happened or is about to happen

*Physical Body*

*body shakes*

*sweaty*

## Actions & Behaviours:

- We get angry with others
- We stop seeing friends
- We don't try new things or go new places
- We isolate ourselves including staying in bedroom
- We stop going to school, college or work

These behaviours and actions may stop these difficult thoughts and feelings but in the long term they can make our life smaller and less enjoyable.

- headaches
- feeling tearful
- feeling dizzy
- feelings like we can't breathe
- heart beating faster
- upset tummy & feeling sick
- needing to go to the toilet

# How to deal with stress and anxiety

There are lots of things that we can do to reduce feelings of stress and anxiety, as well as things that we can do to take care of ourselves during difficult times.

## Recognise triggers

Noticing the things that make us feel stressed and anxious can help us feel better prepared to deal with them and get support as they arise.

## Show self-compassion

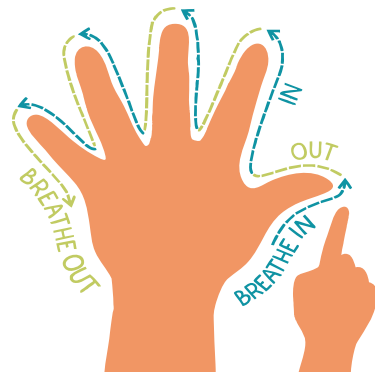
Talk kindly to yourself, use positive self-talk and remember that the way we're feeling is because of stress and anxiety. These feelings can pass, support is out there and things can be better.

## Talk to a trusted person

Talking to someone about our worries and stresses is one of the most important things that we can do to support our mental health and wellbeing.

## Do a breathing exercise

Focussing on our breathing can help us feel calmer and more relaxed. Try this simple five finger breathing exercise.



## Five Finger Breathing

Deep breathing using your hand

## Journal

Writing down difficult thoughts and feelings can really help us to make sense of them and recognise triggers. A journal can also be used to write a gratitude list, helping us refocus on the positive aspects of our lives.

## Challenge negative thoughts

Change negative thoughts into positive thoughts as they come to mind. For example: "I can't do this" becomes "I can't do this yet", while "This will go badly" becomes "This could go really well and I'll give it my best try."

## Use distractions

Stress and anxiety can sometimes feel overwhelming. During these times it can help to do things to distract us from these difficult feelings, just for as long as it takes us to calm down and be able to think clearly.

Distractions include:

- Count slowly to 10 and back
- Go for a run
- Cuddle a pet
- Doodle or colour in
- Think of the words of a song or poem

## Minimise social media

If social media is causing feelings of stress or anxiety, try to reduce the amount of time spent on it. Social media is a great way of keeping in touch with people but if certain people or content is becoming overwhelming, we can mute or unfollow.

## Accept what we can and cannot control

There are many things that we cannot control. Once we recognise what is out of our control we can try to let go of them and instead focus our thoughts on what we can control, work on and change.

► Complete your own **Wellbeing Plan** at the end of this booklet.

# Looking after our mental health



**We all have mental health and we all experience stress. By looking after our mental and physical health, we can also learn to better manage stress and anxiety.**

**Self-care** - including things in our daily lives that make us feel good, calm and relaxed supports positive mental health. Try reading, drawing, cooking, listening to music, watching a favourite movie or taking a bath.

**Be active** - regular physical exercise has been proven to have a positive effect on both our physical and mental health. Try to get fresh air each day, go for a walk or run, join a fitness class or play sport with others.

**Stay hydrated** - Water and diluting juice are great but try to reduce caffeine intake that comes from energy drinks and coffee. It's recommended that we all drink 2L of water every day, so top up where possible.

**Sleep well** - a good night's sleep can make all the difference to our mood and daily life. Establish a regular bedtime routine and switch off social media a while before getting into bed. Read or listen to a sleep story, or relaxation app, to feel more settled.

**Eat well** - too much junk food can leave us feeling tired and affect our general energy levels. Try to eat some fruit and vegetables every day, which benefits both physical and mental health.



# Supporting others experiencing stress and anxiety



It can be difficult when someone we know is experiencing stress, anxiety, or another mental health challenge. There are however things we can do to help.

## Listen to how they're feeling

...without trying to fix the problem. Sometimes just feeling listened to can make a world of difference.

## Ask them how you can help

...and give them the information from this booklet.

## Ask them if they are feeling stressed or anxious about something

...and listen well to what they say. Don't worry if they don't want to talk, just reassure them that you are there for them.

## Explore with them who else they can speak to about how they are feeling

...and this could be a trusted adult at school, a family friend or even their doctor.

**At the back of this booklet there are useful helplines and support services.**



If you are worried that someone is at risk of harming themselves please speak to a trusted adult as soon as possible.

Remember that looking after ourselves is especially important when supporting others.

► Why not complete your own **Wellbeing Plan** on the next page. Cut it out and look at it to keep you feeling good or support you when you are feeling stressed or anxious.

# My Wellbeing Plan

The things that make me feel good are:

The things that cause me to feel stressed or anxious are:

The people who can support me when I'm feeling stressed or anxious are:

The things that I can do to manage my stress and anxiety are:

Positive self-talk:

I can only try my best

I deserve to feel good about myself

I am growing as a person every day

These feelings will pass

why not add your own?



## Useful Contacts

### **Breathing Space (Scotland)**

0800 83 85 87 | [breathingspace.scot](https://breathingspace.scot)

Delivers telephone support to anyone, over the age of 16 years, who is feeling low, anxious or depressed.

### **Childline**

0800 1111 (free 24/7) | [childline.org.uk](https://childline.org.uk)

Provides help and advice to children and young people, under the age of 19.

### **NHS 24**

0800 83 85 87 | [breathingspace.scot](https://breathingspace.scot)

Confidential out of office hours telephone line for people experiencing low mood anxiety or depression.

### **Papyrus Hopeline247**

0800 068 4141 | 07860 039967 (free 24/7)

[papyrus-uk.org/help-advice](https://papyrus-uk.org/help-advice)

A support and advice service for children and young people experiencing thoughts of suicide and anyone concerned that a young person could be thinking about suicide.

### **Samaritans**

116 123 (free 24/7) | [samaritans.org](https://samaritans.org)

Offers emotional support to anyone feeling down or struggling to cope.

### **The Mix**

[themix.org.uk/get-support](https://themix.org.uk/get-support)

Offers support to anyone up to the age of 25 years. Their free Crisis Messenger service is run in partnership with Shout.







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