



香港城市精神健康聯盟

**City Mental Health
Alliance** HK

**SUPPORTING THE
MENTAL HEALTH
OF CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE**

A TOOLKIT FOR PARENTS

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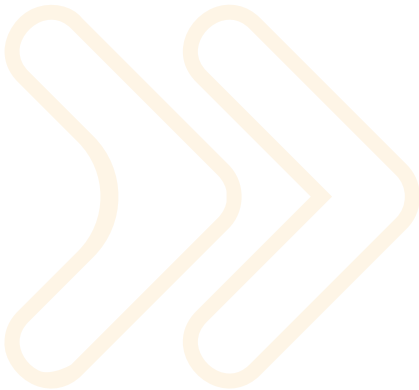
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Sources of support your child can access



About this toolkit

It is worrying and stressful for any parent to see their child having difficulty with their mental health, and when you need information it can be hard to know where to start.

That's why we've compiled this toolkit; to provide an overview of the key topics, signpost to further information from trusted sources, and share insights from parents and young people who have been with faced mental health challenges. This toolkit will help you to:

- understand good mental health and mental health difficulties in children and young people
- be aware of why and when difficulties can arise and what to look out for
- know how to help your child if they are struggling
- know when and how to get professional help
- understand that you need to look after yourself, too.

This toolkit is based on the [CMHA UK toolkit for parents](#). While we have incorporated many Hong Kong specific resources, we also included a number of useful links and resources from [Place2Be](#) and [YoungMinds](#), both of which are respected mental health charities in the UK. We have verified that all the international sources included in this toolkit provide useful and relevant information for parents, no matter where they are based.



If your child is going through a mental health crisis and you need help now, skip to [page 18](#).



This is an interactive pdf.

Click on the links to skip between sections, or go straight to further information from trusted online sources.

We would like to thank our contributor, [Coolminds](#) (a joint initiative between [Mind HK](#) and [KELY Support Group](#)) for contributing their time to support the localisation of this toolkit.



A joint initiative by
共同策劃機構



INTRODUCTION

Mental health in children and young people

Mental health refers to the way we think, behave and feel. Like their physical health, our children's mental health can change over time, and any child or young person can experience mental health difficulties.

Recent research found that 42% of youth often or always felt sad or down for a long period of time, and 3 out of 5 young people have worried that someone they know will harm themselves. Children in Hong Kong ranked lowest in an [international survey of children's well-being](#) carried out in 2020.

Most children will face challenges in their lives that could pose a risk to their mental health. Some people are genetically more prone to a mental health condition if it runs in their family. However, many children also have things in their life that balance out those risks and help them to bounce back from difficulty. **These are called resilience factors.** They could include a strong relationship with a trusted person, enjoyment of school, interest in sports or other activities, good friendships, spiritual or religious faith.

Everyone has a unique combination of risk and resilience factors and, as parents, we can support our children to get into good mental health habits and build up their defences.

Nevertheless, we can't prevent our young people from struggling sometimes. That's why it's important to recognise the signs of mental health difficulty, to know how to support your child to cope, and when and how to seek extra help.

We can't prevent our young people from struggling sometimes. That's why it's important to recognise the signs.

No parent wants to see their child struggling with any illness, and mental ill health can be very upsetting and frightening because it can make our loved one sad, fearful, angry or unpredictable.

If you're going through this right now, remember that:

1. You and your child can get through this. Lots of young people experience mental health difficulties and come out the other side. Modern therapies and treatments - if they need them - are very effective.
2. You are not alone. Every situation is unique but right now there are many families in Hong Kong with a child with mental health difficulties, and many more who have been there in the past. So reach out for support, whether it's from friends and family, or charities and chatrooms.

THE DEVELOPING BRAIN



Early years (0-5 years)



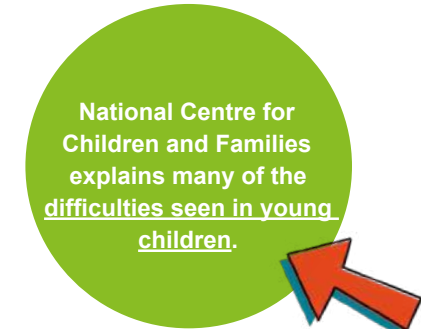
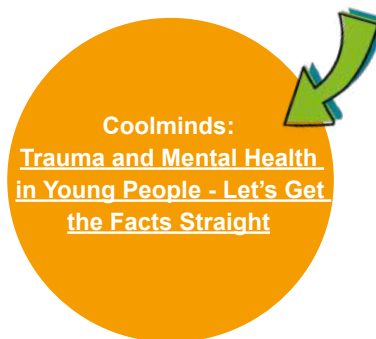
We are born with billions of brain cells – many more than we need.

To begin with, our brain cells are only loosely connected. As we interact with our environment in early life - for instance by playing with others, climbing, drawing and painting, being read to, feeling safe and loved - the brain cells that we use a lot develop stronger connections. The cells that aren't used are eventually discarded.

This 'pruning' is a normal process in early development as our brain - guided by our experiences and our genes - gets rid of the cells it doesn't need. This helps the brain become more efficient and ready to process complex information.

Research shows that persistent adversity in early life – such as ongoing abuse or neglect – can have a profound impact on the developing brain. However, we also know that many factors determine brain development and, with the right help, the impact of negative experiences can be reduced.*

A lot of brain development takes place in the first five years of life, but different parts of the brain develop at different rates. The prefrontal cortex (the part of our brain behind the forehead), which is involved in impulse control, among other functions, is not fully developed until age 25. That's why younger children need help to understand and manage strong feelings.



MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES IN YOUNG CHILDREN

Difficulties at this age can include anxieties and phobias, issues with toileting, feeding or sleeping. Some children may experience challenges with behaviour at school. This can lead to them refusing to go to school or being excluded, withdrawing or not speaking, experiencing difficulties with friends and excessive worrying.



*J Bick and C Nelson 2016. Early Adverse Experiences and the Developing Brain. Neuropsychopharmacology 41(1) 177-196

Adolescence, teenage and beyond (12-20 years)

Apart from the early years, no other period of our lives comes with as many changes in the brain as our pre-teens and teens.

The adolescent and teenage brain is growing and changing rapidly. This is when unused cells in the thinking and processing part of the brain are pruned away and the remaining connections are strengthened.

The brain's emotional and reward system (when we experience feelings of pleasure in response to something we enjoy) becomes much more sensitive at this time. But the prefrontal cortex - responsible for decision-making, planning ahead, thinking about consequences and controlling impulses - is the last to develop.

All this change adds up to make teenagers more prone to taking risks and making impulsive decisions, as well as expressing more and stronger emotions.

Raising Children Network on brain development in pre-teens and teenagers.

MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES IN ADOLESCENTS AND TEENAGERS

Behavioural disorders are common in young adolescents, but can be due to neurodiversity such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC) rather than mental health problems.

Emotional disorders such as depression tend to emerge a little later.

Globally, depression, anxiety and behavioural disorders are among the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents.

SKIP TO PAGE 21 FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT SPECIFIC MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS.

COOLMINDS:
Parenting Style Affects
Teenagers' Emotional
Wellbeing

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS



Good habits

A parent's first instinct is to protect their child from difficult feelings, but no-one can escape stress, risks and adversities altogether; they are part of life. Our role is to help our children build their coping skills by showing them how we deal with challenges, to help them learn how to talk about their feelings and encourage them to ask for help if they need it.

HEALTHY HABITS

The things we encourage and support our children to do to look after their bodies are vital for their mental health. Eating well, exercising and getting enough sleep are key.

- **Coolminds** explains the [importance of sleep](#) and [sleep and young people](#)
- **Place2Be** has [tips for tackling issues around sleep and bedtime](#)
- **YoungMinds** has a [young person's guide to sleep problems](#)

BUILDING RESILIENCE

As parents we can do all sorts of everyday things that make our children more able to cope with, and bounce back from, difficulties; from creating consistent routines to helping them challenge themselves.

- **Place2Be** has [advice on raising a resilient child](#)
- **MindEd for Families** has information on [building confidence and resilience](#)

ROLE-MODELLING

You can help to show your child that it's OK to have strong feelings, that it's possible to cope with and manage them, and that you can do things to look after yourself.

- **YoungMinds** talks more about [looking after yourself as a parent](#)
- **Place2Be** offers tips on [how to manage strong emotions when you argue with your child](#)

COMMUNICATING

It's useful to get into the habit of talking about feelings with your children, so that if they experience mental health difficulties, the lines of communication are already open. 'Check in' with them every so often, while you're doing things together. YoungMinds has a brilliant [list of conversation starters you can download](#), which are relevant and universal for children everywhere.

SAFE INTERNET USE

It can feel overwhelming keeping track of the latest internet sensations, gaming trends and social media platforms. Talk to your child about the importance of switching off and recognising how online content can make them feel.

- **Coolminds** provides a guide on [social media and teenagers](#)
- **KELY Support Group** has a toolkit on [being e-safe](#)
- **YoungMinds** has a guide to [helping your child have healthy social media habits](#) and [a guide for parents on how to talk to children about gaming](#)
- **Place2Be** has a [guide to safe and responsible gaming](#) in primary years
- **Thinkuknow** has games and guidance on safe internet use for children of all ages, and parents

Common triggers

Any child can experience difficulty and distress with their mental health at times, and it's often a direct response to what is happening in their life.

Children and young people go through all kinds of changes as they grow up. The current generation of young people has even had to come to terms with a pandemic. Helping your child to understand the changes that are going on, and acknowledging the feelings they are having, can play an important part in helping them get through their difficulties. Being their anchor - remaining calm, consistent and reliable - is especially important during times of change.

SCHOOL TRANSITION

Starting primary school, changing schools, or moving up to secondary school are big steps in your child's life.

- **Coolminds** offers perspectives of [mental health and the transition to high school](#)
- **Place2Be** has tips on [helping your child when they start or change primary school](#), [how to support your child if they struggle when you say goodbye](#) at the school gate and how to [help your child as they transition to secondary school](#)

BEREAVEMENT

You'll want to take your child's pain away, but when someone (or a pet) that they love has died you can't do that. It's important to allow your child to grieve.

- **Coolminds** has a [factsheet on grief and loss](#)
- **Place2Be** has [advice for parents of primary age children when someone dies](#)
- **YoungMinds** has [information on grief and loss in young people](#)

Helping your child to understand changes, and acknowledging their feelings, can help them to get through difficulties.

FAMILY SEPARATION

During a break-up, or while you establish co-parenting routines with your ex-partner your child will need a lot of reassurance. It's important they don't feel they have to take sides.

- **Hong Kong Divorce** offers perspectives on [childrens' views in divorce and their mental health](#)
- **MindNLife** looks into [how collaborative divorce protects children](#)
- **YoungMinds** has [a guide for parents on divorce and separation](#)
- **Place2Be** provides [information if you're going through a break-up and want to support your child](#) and [advice on co-parenting after separation or divorce](#)

OTHER TRIGGERS

Your child may experience mental health difficulties at other times, due to things that are going on in their life, or the way they feel about themselves. Below is more useful information on other common triggers, such as:

- [exam time and results day](#)
- [being bullied](#) (also [here](#) and [here](#))
- [unhealthy perfectionism](#)
- [friendship issues](#)
- [sexuality](#)
- [traumatic events.](#)

YoungMinds' advice on [helping your child through transitions and times of change.](#)

Building your child's resilience can help them to bounce back from tough times. Find out more from [Place2Be.](#)

Feeling different

As children grow up, they learn about who they are and how they fit into the world. Feeling like they don't fit in can lead to real distress. Being teased, bullied or excluded for being different can make this distress a lot worse.

ETHNICITY

Children may experience discrimination because of their ethnicity, which can severely impact mental health.

- **Coolminds** provides a clinician's advice on [stigma, discrimination and mental health](#) together with a list of Hong Kong community resources
- **YoungMinds** has [a guide for parents on racism and mental health](#)
- **Place2Be** provides advice on [how to talk to your child about race and discrimination](#)

Coolminds a [Guide for Young People on Discrimination and Mental Health](#)

NEURODIVERSITY

Neurodiversity covers a wide variety of often hidden differences in how the brain has developed, including Autism Spectrum Conditions, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia and Tourette's syndrome. For some people, neurodiversity can mean they are better at some things than most people, but additional support or adjustments may be needed for the things they struggle with, and to combat exclusion. Read more in resources by Coolminds and YoungMinds below.

- [A guide for young people on ADHD and mental health](#)
- [A guide for parents on autism and mental health](#) / [Autism Spectrum Disorder + Young People](#)

DISABILITY

Having additional needs or disabilities can lead to a child experiencing challenges that lower self-confidence, making it harder to make friends which can increase their social isolation. These factors can result in children with disabilities being more likely than their non-disabled peers to experience mental health problems. Read a [real story from a young person living with disability](#), from YoungMinds.

LGBTQ+

Gender identity and sexual orientation both take shape through childhood and adolescence. Supporting your child to understand their gender identity and sexuality will give them confidence in who they are without guilt, shame or fear of rejection from family. However, LGBTQ+ children and young people can experience prejudice, discrimination and bullying. They may also experience gender dysphoria: the distress when someone's assigned gender does not match their identity. These factors mean they may be more likely to experience difficulties with their mental health.

- **Coolminds** provides information on [coping with gender dysphoria](#), [peer pressure in LGBTQ+ spaces](#) and [top 5 myths about LGBT and mental health](#)
- **AMAZE** provides medically accurate and age-appropriate [sex education resources](#)
- **YoungMinds** has [a guide for young people on sexuality and mental health](#)
- **Place2Be** has a guide on [supporting your child through the different stages of sexual development](#)

YoungMinds has information to help [young people who are feeling misunderstood](#).

Signs that your child is struggling

It is normal for a young person to have times when they feel angry, sad, worried or stressed. These feelings can be expressed in many different ways, such as:

- sudden changes in behaviour
- negative thoughts and low self-esteem
- arguing and fighting
- sleep problems
- avoiding school and activities, withdrawing or unwilling to leave parent or carer
- complaining about aches and pains
- overactivity
- wetting the bed, when previously dry at night

Often these feelings, and the behaviours they cause, pass with time. It can sometimes be hard to know when difficult feelings go beyond that, but signs that are a cause for concern include:

- difficulties that last a long time
- persistent 'out of character' behaviour
- if your child is hurting themselves (see panel)
- if your child is having suicidal thoughts ([see page 14](#))
- if another child's safety is at risk
- difficulties that are interfering with your child's development
- if the situation is overwhelming for parents or carers

You know your child, so you're well placed to recognise if their negative feelings or unhelpful thoughts are becoming overwhelming. If that happens, you might need to seek extra help.

Need help now?
Go straight to "What to
do if you are worried",
on [p18](#)

SELF-HARM

Some young people self-harm as a way to deal with difficult feelings, express something that is hard to put into words and to reduce overwhelming thoughts and have a sense of control.

It's natural to feel incredibly worried and upset if you believe or discover that your child is self-harming, but keep in mind that they can get through it - many young people who self-harm do recover. There is a lot of information and advice out there to help you understand self-harm and support your child.

- Coolminds has a resource on [recognising and responding to self-harm](#) and a [neuroscientific way of looking at teenage suicide](#)
- MindNLife shares [what research has taught us on self-harm](#)
- YoungMinds has [a guide for parents on self-harm](#)
- Place2Be has [an article on how to support a young person who is self-harming](#)

Suicidal thoughts

Many young people will have thoughts about suicide at some point. This doesn't mean they are going to attempt suicide, but it does mean they need help and support.

It's not always easy to know if your child is having suicidal thoughts. Many young people will keep it to themselves. While the following won't apply to everyone, certain changes in behaviour may be warning signs:

- expressing feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, sadness, guilt or shame
- spending lots of time alone and withdrawing from friends and family
- losing interest in things they usually enjoy
- giving away their possessions
- appearing agitated or behaving in ways that seem out of character
- eating or sleeping more or less than usual
- using drugs and alcohol to help them cope when they're struggling
- self-harming.

TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE

It can feel really difficult to raise the subject of suicidal thoughts with your child. But talking about it does not make it more likely to happen, and it may help them. A young person who is thinking about suicide often feels very alone with their dark thoughts, so being able to share their worries may help them feel less isolated. Don't be afraid to ask directly whether they are thinking about suicide. **The Weez Project** looks into the [myths about suicide](#) and **HKUST Counselling and Wellness Center** has [a guide on coping with suicidal feelings](#).

If your child tells you they are having suicidal thoughts:

- take their feelings seriously
- reassure them that you're really glad they've told you and that they're not alone
- don't try to fix or downplay their feelings - empathise with just how bad things are for them
- think together about why they are feeling this way

After the conversation, seek professional help (skip to What to do if you are worried, on [p18](#)). If your child doesn't want to talk to you, you can't make them. Consider whether there is another trusted person they may want to talk to and help to arrange this. Make sure they know there are organisations they can contact day or night (find these in the [Appendix](#)).



The Weez Project and Coolminds have a [resource on dealing with suicidal thoughts](#)

The biggest sign that someone is at risk of attempting suicide is if they have made plans, for example thinking about how, when or where they would do it, or researching methods online.

In this case, seek urgent professional help: call 999 or take them to A&E. See a list of Hong Kong emergency hotlines [here](#).



It's hard to ask anyone, let alone your own child 'do you feel like you want to take your own life?'. But becoming a mental health first-aider at work made me realise we mustn't be afraid to have the conversation. If your child says yes, try not to react from a place of fear and upset and try to fix it, but listen and acknowledge what's being said." – Parent

One young person's experience



I FIRST NOTICED I WAS STRUGGLING WITH MY MENTAL HEALTH WHEN I WAS ABOUT 14 YEARS OLD..I REMEMBER FEELING A STRANGE MIX OF ANGRY AND LONELY AT THE SAME TIME. I'D GET HOME FROM SCHOOL EXHAUSTED... LIE-INS AT WEEKENDS GOT LONGER, MY MOOD GOT WORSE, AND I GRADUALLY CAME TO BELIEVE 'I'M JUST NOT A HAPPY PERSON'.

Looking back, there were a couple of clear causes. Firstly, I was becoming a perfectionist, and had attached a lot of my self-esteem to my performance at school. As the work got harder, perfect marks became less attainable. This made me sensitive - inclined to stropiness and anger - and spiralled into feeling very isolated and unhappy.

The second cause was I started to realise my attraction to men, my response was to push this down and deny it. I developed a hard exterior and did everything I could to avoid seeming 'different'.

It wasn't until I eventually came out to my parents three years later that I started to realise I was depressed. Coming out, and being accepted for who I am gave me the space to start understanding my emotions, and discuss them with my parents and friends.

Those conversations with my parents were the main reason that I was eventually able to seek help with my mental health. The most useful thing they did was listen - over the course of many chats they let me talk about my emotions, and listened without judgement. My GP diagnosed me with moderate anxiety and depression... it gave me the language to communicate how I was feeling and understand my behaviour.

Now five years since my diagnosis, I feel like a whole different person. I hope that young people going through a similar thing at the moment know: things start getting better as soon as you start to talk.



TAKING ACTION



How to speak to your child if they're struggling

YoungMinds has more ideas for ways to get the conversation started and advice on how to talk about mental health.

My Emotions Activity Book may help young children open up about how they're feeling.

When you realise your child is struggling with their feelings, talking to them about it can be hard. You might not know where to start or when is the best time.

Here are some [tips for starting a conversation](#).

- Try open-ended questions like 'What's on your mind?' or 'What do you think or feel about...?'
- Don't immediately try to offer solutions, young people need to know that you are there to support them.
- Be non-judgemental. Listen attentively to what your child is saying.
- Sometimes talking while doing an activity together can feel less pressured and intense. Doing something physical can also help to release feelings of anxiety.
- If your child doesn't want to talk right now, reassure them that they can talk to you at any time.
- If your child always finds it hard to talk, give them the opportunity to communicate in other ways that aren't face-to-face, such as instant messaging.

As parents, we want to take the pain away, but it's important to avoid dismissing your child's experience by saying things like 'don't worry'. Show them that you're really listening and that you believe what they're telling you about their feelings and fears.

- **Tell them what you've noticed**, e.g. 'you seem a bit wobbly/sad/down/angry lately, I'm wondering if you're worried about something'.
- **Saying 'it's understandable that you're feeling...'** helps them know they are entitled to those feelings. It's different from 'I understand', which puts you in the role of an expert.
- **Let them know that you love them**, that you're there for them and that you can help them get support if they need it.
- **Ask them if there's anything you can do** that they would find particularly helpful.
- **Give them hope** by reassuring them that things can change, and they can feel better.
- While you'll want to ask lots of questions to find out as much as you can about your child's difficulties, that can feel like an interrogation. Sometimes it's better to **focus on the here and now**, and what would help moving forward.
- **Try to stay calm**, keep listening and be patient.

What to do if you are worried

If you are worried about your child's mental health, reach out for some extra help. Getting support early can be very beneficial, so don't wait until things have become very serious. There are lots of different services and there will be something or someone out there to help you and your child.

IF YOU'RE CONCERNED, AND NEED HELP

It's important to talk to your child about the situation first. But even if they're not yet ready to talk to anyone else, you can still reach out for advice and support. It can be helpful to tell your child that you are doing this, particularly for teenagers.

Talking to your family doctor is a good first step. Make an appointment with your family doctor, or ask if any of the doctors at your surgery specialise in young people's mental health. The family doctor should be able to tell you what support is available near you, and make referrals.

Tell your child's school or college what's going on. They should be able to provide someone - such as a counsellor - who your child can talk to regularly and in confidence about how they're feeling, if they want to, as well as offering other support.

If you're considering paying for private mental health support, see if the school or the family doctor can recommend someone.

If you are in a crisis

If you are worried that your child is at immediate risk of harm, or is not safe, call 999 or take them to A&E. A mental health emergency is as serious as a physical one.



**Coolminds
directory of
EMERGENCY
HOTLINES**

Parenting in difficult times

Being a parent is hard, even when things are going well. When your child is dealing with a mental health issue it can be incredibly difficult to stay calm and to think straight.

“It’s like the analogy of putting your own oxygen mask on first in an aeroplane. You do need to make sure you’re in a good place to be able to support your child. I got some help – counselling – and found it incredibly helpful to talk to someone that wasn’t emotionally invested in the situation.” – Parent

It is very common for parents and carers to blame themselves or to feel helpless or useless. But remember that many families are going through similar challenges right now - you are not alone, and you can get through this.

OPENNESS AND COMMUNICATION

It is understandable that you may want to rush in and do what you think needs doing to rescue your child. However, this can disempower them and exacerbate their difficulties. It’s really important to talk to your child about what they think will be helpful and to respect their views, even if you disagree. Your child will need to agree to any approach if it is going to work.

- **YoungMinds** has advice on [working through problems with your child](#)

No-one can manage mental illness in the family alone. Reach out to friends, relatives, your family doctor, or specialist organisations for support, advice, or just a listening ear. Gathering support around you helps everyone to be there for the child or young person who is struggling, as well as for other family members.

- **Coolminds** has a [resource for helping someone who has a mental illness: for family and friends](#)
- Check your employment benefits and insurance cover. You may have access to support via an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) for yourself and possibly your family members.

SELF-CARE

Parenting a child who’s going through mental health challenges is incredibly demanding. You’ll have times when you feel completely drained. Don’t feel guilty about having periods of frustration - it’s totally understandable given the difficulty in dealing with this kind of situation. It’s important to find ways to look after yourself, so that you protect your own mental health and put enough back ‘in the tank’ to give your child what they need.

- The Hong Kong children’s charity **Variety** has a [Caregiver Program](#)
- Find [tips for looking after yourself](#) from **Place2Be**
- [The Parents’ Survival Guide](#) from **YoungMinds** has encouragement and advice
- **MindEd** has [information about parenting a child with mental health issues](#)



One parent's experience



WE REALISE NOW THAT THE VERY FIRST SYMPTOM OF OUR DAUGHTER'S MENTAL DIFFICULTIES APPEARED WHEN SHE WAS AGED EIGHT. SHE JUST SAID SHE COULDN'T SLEEP...WE DIDN'T PICK UP THAT THERE WAS WIDER ANXIETY, SHE WAS EBULLIENT AT SCHOOL AND SOCIALLY, WE DIDN'T SPOT ANY SIGNS.

It wasn't until she was in Year 7 that other behaviours manifested... I noticed more erratic sleeping, she would have very dramatic and sometimes violent outbursts, lots of arguments, extreme mood swings. She went through a period of not eating, and several months when she said she wanted to change gender.

But by the time she was 14, she had become very closed down. One Sunday we were having a heated discussion in the car on our way to a family lunch, and she told us she was self-harming.

Behind all the behaviours, we knew there was someone in there who was confused and upset. My first port of call was the GP, and after a long wait my daughter was diagnosed with anxiety and put on the list for talking services.

My advice to other parents on the start of this journey is to recognise that there are boundaries to what you can do... I think that even if I'd had all the vocabulary and all the tools and training, as her parent, I still wouldn't be the person she would accept help from.

It still feels precarious and fragile, but [with help] little by little our daughter - now aged 16 - has improved and is in a much better place than she was.



CONDITIONS & TREATMENTS

Common mental health conditions

An outline of some of the mental health difficulties seen in children and young people, and further information from trusted sources.

ADDICTION

Addiction is when a person has no control over whether they use something - such as drugs, alcohol, gaming or social media - and they have become physically or psychologically dependent on it. Substance abuse means using a drug or alcohol in a harmful way, but does not necessarily mean the person is addicted. However, addiction can begin as abuse.

- **KELY Support Group** has toolkits on [drug and alcohol awareness](#)
- **Coolminds** has resource on [social media addiction](#)

ANXIETY

Fear and worry are normal emotions, but anxiety can become a problem if it feels overwhelming or goes on for a long time. It can start to impact behaviour, interfering with school, home and social life. It can cause panic attacks. Some children are more prone to feeling anxious and some children can pick up anxious behaviour from others around them. It can also develop following a stressful or traumatic event.

- **Coolminds** looks into the [signs and symptoms of anxiety](#) and [seeking help for anxiety](#)
- A [free e-booklet The Anxious Child](#) can be downloaded from the **Mental Health Foundation**

BIPOLAR DISORDER

Bipolar disorder causes people to experience periods of extremely high or low mood - lasting days or even weeks. In children or young people, bipolar disorder can impact sleep, energy levels, behaviour, thinking and relationships.

- **Coolminds** has a guide for young people [about bipolar disorder](#)

DEPRESSION

It is normal to feel low at times, but if this becomes overwhelming or lasts for a long time it might be depression. Depression can be due to past or present stressful or upsetting experiences, or it may run in the family. Depression often goes undiagnosed but it can be treated, and parents can help.

- **Coolminds** looks into the [causes of depression](#) and [depression in adolescents](#)
- **HelpGuide** has a detailed [parent's guide to teen depression](#)

EATING DISORDERS

Problems with eating commonly emerge during adolescence and young adulthood. The most common disorders are bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder and anorexia nervosa. People with eating disorders use eating - or not eating - as a way to cope with difficult feelings. They will eat much less or much more than usual. They may also exercise to excess, or get rid of food eaten for instance by being sick or misusing laxatives. This is known as purging.

- **Coolminds** looks into [eating and body image disorders in young people](#)
- **Family Lives** has a useful [article and case study on eating disorders](#)

OCD

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) is a type of anxiety disorder that affects a person's everyday life. OCD has two main parts: obsessions and compulsions. Obsessions are unwelcome thoughts, images, urges, worries or doubts that repeatedly appear in the person's mind and cause them to feel very anxious. Compulsions are repetitive actions or rituals to try and make the obsessions go away. This can become a vicious cycle.

- **Coolminds** has a resource on [obsessive compulsive & related disorders](#)

PERSONALITY DISORDER

A person may receive a diagnosis of personality disorder if they experience significant difficulties in how they relate to themselves and others and have problems coping day to day. It's uncommon for children and adolescents to be diagnosed with a personality disorder, because their personalities are still emerging and evolving.

- Mind HK has [information about personality disorders](#)
- YoungMinds has a [guide to borderline personality disorder for young people](#)

PSYCHOSIS

Psychosis is when a person's thoughts are so disturbed they lose touch with reality. They may hear voices, see or feel things that aren't there, or believe things that are not true. Some people have a one-off psychotic episode, which could be caused by a stressful event, illness or drug use. In other cases there may be regular episodes, sometimes linked to other conditions such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia. Although psychosis can affect people of all ages, it rarely occurs before the older teenage years.

- The Hospital Authority has an [Early Assessment Service for Young People with Early Psychosis](#)
- The Royal College of Psychiatrists has [information about psychosis](#) aimed at young people
- YoungMinds has a [guide to psychosis for young people](#)

PTSD

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that can develop after experiencing or witnessing something extremely frightening or distressing. Symptoms can include flashbacks, avoidance of triggers, being very tense and other mood changes. PTSD can be treated.

- Mind HK has a [factsheet on PTSD](#)

SCHIZOPHRENIA

Schizophrenia is a severe long-term mental health condition with a range of psychological symptoms which can include hallucinations, delusions, loss of interest in everyday activities and withdrawal from others. It usually starts between the ages of 15 and 35, but it is rare for it to be diagnosed before adulthood. Effective treatment is available.

- The Hospital Authority has [resources on schizophrenia](#)

RECOVERY FROM MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

Getting better can mean different things to different people. With support, many young people will be able to make full clinical recovery, where they no longer have mental health symptoms. Others may achieve good personal recovery, according to what is important to them as individuals. This could be something like feeling in control of their emotions, thinking more positively and having hope for the future, or being able to achieve something that they find difficult, such as going to school.

Read more about [personal recovery](#), from Rethink Mental Illness. The [Mental Health Association of Hong Kong](#) also offers rehabilitation services.

Treatments and therapies

If your child has been referred to a mental health service – or you have self-referred – the specialists there will carry out an assessment. This will confirm whether your child’s difficulties meet a mental health diagnosis, and what support or treatment is most appropriate.

The results of the assessment and recommendations will be discussed with you and your child, so you can agree on a care plan together.

TALKING THERAPIES

Any treatment that involves a person talking to a trained therapist about their difficulties is known as a [talking therapy](#). They come in many different forms, suited to different situations. Some of the most common for young people are:

- **Counselling** usually involves weekly one-to-one sessions with a counsellor, who will help your child to think about their situation. This is ideal for people who are generally well, but need help coping with a current crisis, and it may even be available at your child’s school.
- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)** supports a young person to look at how they can manage their thoughts, feelings and behaviours, and how changing the way they think can help them feel better.
- **Family therapy**, as the name suggests, involves the whole family. It’s used in situations where the family unit is having difficulty, perhaps because one member of the family has a serious problem that’s affecting everyone.

Coolminds has a [guide on seeking help and what to expect](#)

- **YoungMinds** has [a guide for young people on talking therapies and counselling](#), including real stories
- **Dr Kimberley Carder** shares [three things to expect when your child goes to therapy](#)

MEDICATION

There is a lot of evidence that talking therapies work well, but medicines can also help in some cases. For instance, for young people with ADHD, severe depression or anxiety.

- **YoungMinds** has [a medicines glossary](#) and [real stories from young people about taking medication for mental health conditions](#)

INPATIENT TREATMENT

Most children and young people who need treatment or therapy will continue living at home and attend regular appointments with their mental health care providers. This is referred to as ‘outpatient’ or ‘community’ care.

If a young person needs intensive mental health support, or is at risk of serious harm to themselves or others, they may benefit from a period in hospital. Usually this happens if doctors at the Hospital Authority have assessed the individual to be in need of in-patient psychiatric treatment and they have the agreement of the child or young person. However, if the risk of harm is so high that their doctors think admission is essential, the Mental Health Ordinance can be used to admit the young person against their will. Read more [here](#).

Appendix - Sources of support your child can access

HELPLINES

- **KELY Support Group Project Connect**
- Youth Referral Service - 25216907
(Cantonese / English / Mandarin)
- **Youth Outreach** - 24 hour hotline
- 90881023 (Cantonese / English / Mandarin)
- **Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups**
- 'Youthline' hotline (Mon to Sat, 2pm-2am) - 27778899
- **Suicide Prevention Hotline** - 24 hours hotline: 23820000 / 'YouthLink' hotline service (2pm-2am): 23820777 (Cantonese only)
- **The Samaritans** - Multilingual suicide prevention hotline (24 hours): 28960000
- **The Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong**
- 24 hour hotline service: 23892222

TEXTLINES

- **KELY Support Group Project Connect**
- Mobile hotline/WhatsApp/Signal - 56476688
- **Caritas Infinity Teens** - WhatsApp/Signal - 93773666
- **The Boys & Girls Clubs Association of Hong Kong** - WhatsApp/Signal - 97268159 / 98528625
- **The Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong**
- online chat service: [ChatPoint](#) (English and Chinese)

COMMUNITIES

- [OpenUp](#) - 24 hours online counselling service for youths aged 11-35
- [KELY Support Group](#)
- [Baptist Oi Kwan Social Service](#)
- [Save the Children](#) mental wellbeing programmes
- [St James' Settlement](#) - 6pm Cyber Youth Support Team
- [UTouch](#) - Online outreach counselling service - Chinese (Mon to Fri, 2pm-12am)



香港城市精神健康聯盟

**City Mental Health
Alliance** HK

The City Mental Health Alliance Hong Kong (CMHA HK) is a not-for-profit membership organisation. We are an alliance of businesses, working together with mental health experts and partner organisations, to achieve our vision that every workplace will protect, support and create positive mental health for their people.

We provide training, events, resources, research and practical support for companies wishing to create mentally healthy workplaces.

This guide is not and should not be considered as clinical advice or support. Anyone who may have a need for such support should seek professional advice.

CONTACT

For more information, please email: info@cmhahk.org

Website: cmhahk.org

LinkedIn: [City Mental Health Alliance Hong Kong](https://www.linkedin.com/company/city-mental-health-alliance-hong-kong/)