

WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP OURSELVES IN DISTRESS:

Preventing Crisis and Being Safer

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We have divided this document into contents above so that you can access what is a priority for you

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Message for Young People and Parents

Dear Young Person,

You have this document because you have been seen by the Berkshire Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) Rapid Response Team (RRT) after coming in hospital with either a form of self-harm (an overdose, cutting, use of ligature) or high levels of mental distress. Or you have been supported by the one of the duty clinicians at your local CAMHS team.

Firstly, we wanted to say that it is very important for us and all those around you to take your difficulties seriously. Our team is really keen to support young people who present to hospital with high mental distress or self-harm especially when they leave the hospital.

Mental health difficulties are actually quite common in young people, with as many as one in five adolescents affected by mental disorders such as depression, anxiety or regular self-harming at some point. Young people have indicated that the most common reason to self-harm is to manage distressing emotional states. Sometimes, young people experience feelings of guilt and self-blame after coming to hospital in a crisis and we wanted to reassure you as early as possible that there is no need to be harsh and self-critical towards yourself. In fact, we would want to take this opportunity to help you take initial steps to make things easier and perhaps help us understand the sources of those stresses which trigger self-harm behaviours.

In order to understand what is underneath the self-harming behaviours or thoughts, this requires a bit of exploration with you and it can take some time. Nevertheless there are immediate steps, if you are interested, that we wanted to share in this document that we know have supported young people in managing distressing emotional states and self-harming behaviours.

The strategies that this document contains have their sources from cognitive and dialectical behaviour therapy principles. These are psychological programs that have very strong research evidence to support young people affected by mental health difficulties and self-harm.

We can perhaps divide the strategies that enhance mental well being generally with the strategies that are focussed for managing distressing emotional states.

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Things we can do to that reduce stress in general

- We are able to reduce our general levels of stress by making changes to our daily and weekly routine. The suggestions listed below are actually quite powerful in creating positive mental well being. Not all will apply to you.
- Add 20 minutes of physical exercise around four times a week or increase total physical activity. Intense physical activity is one of the most potent mood lifters and there is a lot of evidence to show that people who engage in any type of physical activity, be it may, running, cycling, swimming or any other sport such as boxing or karate score higher for mental well being.
- Increase our socialising with other people. When we are down or stressed, we often tend to pass social opportunities. This should be avoided. Not enough social activity is linked with depression, anxiety and self-harm. Attending youth clubs regularly is a good option, if available.
- Limiting phone and gadget use. This is likely to be an unpopular measure but we are not suggesting that you drastically stop using your phone or laptop. We know that young people have been able to experience less stress by adopting some boundaries around phone use. For example, there is a lot of talk around avoiding the use of our phones a few hours before bedtime. We feel this makes a lot of sense but we realise it is not the easiest thing to implement.
- Mindfulness; Many people have argued that Mindfulness is an easy measure to practice in our day to day lives. Core mindfulness is also a key feature of dialectical behavioural therapy and is known to support emotion regulation. Phone apps are very accessible ways of learning mindfulness. Two popular apps are Headspace and Calm.

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Now what about the times when we feel particularly distressed and we may be experiencing stronger urges to self-harm

We can help ourselves significantly if we are able to note patterns in our emotions that help us predict when we might feel distressing emotions. Often, young people feel distressing emotions and suicidal urges in the evening. If we are able to recognise the increase in distress and act quickly, we might be able to minimise the distress through some of the possible strategies below.

Young people have successfully used certain strategies to manage distressing and strong emotional states that make it more likely for us to self-harm. We will list them below but it is important to note that what works for one may not work for another. It is also true that sometimes the intensity of the emotion is so high that we are unable to try out a particular strategy or the strategy does not produce benefits. Nevertheless, it might be useful to have these options to hand so that one can try it out. Please see strategies leaflets for the full range of available strategies

- **Sport or physical exercise** – a variety of physical measures have been used by young people such as jogging, walking, sit ups, boxing, bike riding going to the gym or even dancing.
- **Creating activities** – writing a journal, playing an instrument, listening to music or drawing are options.
- **“Displacing” emotions** – You may wish to select a tactic of your preference. Common ones are clenching an ice cube in your hand until it melts, snapping an elastic band on your wrist or using a punch bag.
- **Soothing activities** – Taking a bath, playing with a pet or having someone give you a massage is popular options.
- **Talking to someone** - If you find that talking with someone on the phone or webchat helps ease your distress, then you may wish to save the telephone numbers of well known support lines for children such as Samaritans (Telephone No: **116 123 or 0845 790 9090**) and ChildLine (Tel: **116123**). Another option is for you to talk to someone else like a friend, sibling or your parents.

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What can parents/carers do to enhance safety?

Making it harder to get hold of items that can be used to hurt ourselves can reduce the chances of self-harm occurring. If a young person has previously used a ligature or taken a medication overdose, then restricting access is important.

- We need to remove/secure any items, as much as practically possible, that can be used as a ligature, medications or sharp objects to reduce the chances of a suicidal attempt or self-harm act.
- If your child's whereabouts are unknown and concerns exist, you should contact police to report them as vulnerable and missing. If your child has threatened "jumping" or has previously gone to train stations or high rise buildings such as a multi-storey car park, be sure to inform the police of this possibility so the police can narrow their search and little time is wasted in finding your child.
- If concerns are existing; a bedroom search is advised to ensure all potential harmful objects are to be removed.
- Limit access to social media /internet if unlimited access is having a negative impact on your child's mental and emotional wellbeing. It is best for parents and the young person to work together on this to agree some rules and a compassionate approach is recommended.
- Restrict contact with friends/peers 'if' contact is unhelpful during crisis period.
- If the nature of risks are high, you may want to enhance supervision within and outside the home. This must be a short term measure until things are more manageable and there is clarity around more appropriate and sustainable forms of support. This will be advised/guided by the CAMHS clinician at the point of assessment.

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For Urgent Support

- Your child should be taken to A&E (or call for an ambulance) if they require urgent medical attention that is life-threatening such as:
 - They have recently taken an overdose
 - Ingested harmful liquids
 - Cut themselves significantly (deep cut/s and/or bleed profusely)
 - Burns that are blistering/red.
 - Young person has lost consciousness.
- During 8am to 8pm (Mon-Fri excluding Bank Holidays) - If there are urgent/significant concerns about your child's risk/safety in regard to their mental health, then contact the CAMHS Common Point Of Entry **0300 365 1234**.
- Outside of the hours 8am to 8pm, please contact: **0300 365 9999**. This number will be for the 24 hours Berkshire Adults mental health crisis team. This team is designed to support adults in mental health crisis but are able to take calls from young people and parents; and offer advice and direction to support you and your child.
- NHS 24 hour emergency service **999**. Call 999 in a life-threatening medical emergency. This is when someone is seriously ill or injured and their life is at risk.

Resources for support – phone apps, websites, contact numbers

Other Contact Numbers

- **Samaritans** - National 24 hour Listener Telephone No: **116 123 or 0845 790 9090**
- **ChildLine** – a free, private and confidential service where you can talk about anything. Whatever your worry, whenever you need help, we're here for you online, on the phone, anytime. Tel: **116123** www.childline.org.uk
- **YoungMinds** - a leading charity for young people's Mental Health. Parent Helpline: **0808 8025544**
- **The Mix** - If you're under 25 you can talk to The Mix for free on the phone, by email or on their webchat. You can also use their phone counselling service, or get more information on support services you might need. Freephone: 0808 808 4994 (13:00-23:00 daily) www.themix.org.uk
- **NHS 111** (or go to 111.nhs.uk) you should use the NHS 111 service if you urgently need medical help or advice but it's not a life-threatening situation. Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- **PAPYRUS** – a National Charity dedicated to the prevention of young suicide. Provides confidential help and advice to prevent suicide in young people: www.papyrus-uk.org Tel: 0800 0684141.

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- **Family Lives** – a charity supporting parents to avert crisis. Confidential Family Support Service: **0808 800 2222**. <https://www.familylives.org.uk/>
- **Youthline** – A registered Charity providing a free, confidential counselling service for young people attending secondary school, and young adults up to the age of 25. Tel: 0800 0961425 <https://www.youthlineuk.com/>
- **Childline** – a free, private and confidential service where you can talk about anything. Whatever your worry, whenever you need help, we're here for you online, on the phone, anytime. **Tel: 116123** www.childline.org.uk
- **Kooth** - Free, safe and anonymous online support & counselling for young people <https://www.kooth.com/>
- **Bullying UK** 0808 800 2222 Free from Landlines, open 7am-Midnight Website: www.bullying.co.uk

Mobile Apps

- Calm Harm available on Apple and Google Play; free of charge. (Designed to encourage users to distract themselves from urges of self-harm) <https://calmharm.co.uk>
- Self-Heal (Help to avoid self-harm) available on Apple and Google Play; free of charge. A free App created by the University of Oxford to help with the management of self-harm. Includes distraction task suggestions, useful contacts and information on self-harm.
- distrACT available on Apple and Google Play; free of charge. Easy, quick access to information and advice about self-harm and suicidal thoughts in over 17s. Within NHS Apps library.
- MeeTwo available on Apple, Google Play and NHS Apps free of charge. Provides a safe and secure forum for teenagers wanting to discuss any issue affecting their lives. www.meetwo.co.uk.
- Headspace (Guided meditation/mindfulness, relaxation) www.headspace.com available on Apple charged at £9.99/month or £4.99/year.

Guided Self-Help Resources

Anxiety self-help guide <http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/anxiety.asp>

Depression self-help guide <http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/depression.asp>

Anger self-help guide <http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/anger.asp>

Sleep self-help guide <http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/sleepproblems.asp>

Bereavement self-help guide <https://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/bereavement.asp>

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