

Getting help/solving problems — a guide for young people

When you have a problem, don't let it get you down...

Do something positive about it, tell someone you trust and seek help.

Everybody goes through difficult times or personal problems in their lives. Many young people are affected by problems in school such as exam pressures, bullying, feeling left out, problems at home such as arguments with parents or family problems. Some young people are affected by serious problems such as abuse or severe depression or anxiety. It is normal to feel upset, anxious, angry and even depressed when faced with problems. Sometimes you can feel hopeless or that there is nothing you can do to make things better. Remember, there are always steps you can take to improve things:

Recognising there is a problem and taking action

The first thing you can do is recognise there is a problem and then decide to do something about it. Often, this is the hardest step. Many young people can suffer in silence for a long time and find it hard to admit there is a problem. You should always remember that you are not alone and what you are going through is perfectly normal. In addition, there are things you can do to cope:

Talking to someone

Young people say that the biggest thing that helps coping with a problem is talking to someone they trust such as:

Your family

Often parents are the best people to tell when you have a problem, or sometimes a close relative such as an Aunt, Uncle or Grandparent. Pick someone you feel close to and who you think will listen and help.

Your friends

Friends are also people you can talk to, and a good friend is worth a lot when you have a problem.

School teacher

A teacher you know well can be a source of support if you have a problem.

School counsellor

Some schools have a specially trained counsellor, who can give you advice and support on a one-to-one basis.



GP / Doctor

Many young people and their parents go to the family doctor to discuss a problem, especially if it is something serious or worrying. A doctor can provide medical help and support, as well as arrange a referral to a specialist counsellor or therapist if necessary.

Helplines

You can also contact telephone helplines for further help and support, they will be able to provide you with a listening ear.

Childline Freephone: 1800 666 666 (ROI) or 0800 1111 (UK)

Samaritans Freephone (ROI and UK): 116 123

When talking is hard

Though it can be hard to open up and talk to someone when you have a problem, it is important to realise that this can not only help you to plan how best to deal with the problem, it can also bring you relief when you describe your feelings to another person.

If it is difficult to approach the subject with anybody, it might help to practise what you want to say in advance – write it down and get your courage up. It will be easier than you think when you start to get the words out!

Other ways of coping with problems

As well as talking to someone, young people tell us that many other things can help when coping with a problem. Some of these are listed below. Find out what works for you!

Think positively

Having a problem can make us think very negatively about ourselves and our lives. For example, we can say 'I'm useless for feeling low'. This negative thinking will make you feel much worse. The important thing is to think positively and to change your thoughts to more affirmative ones such as, 'I'm learning to cope with the problem' or 'Things will get better soon'. It is also useful to try and focus on the good things in your life e.g. 'I'm glad I can talk to my friend / parent / teacher' or 'at least I really enjoy playing football'.

Spend time doing things you enjoy

Many young people distract themselves from their problems by absorbing themselves in an activity or things they enjoy doing. Whether its football, listening to music, art, going shopping or whatever you like to do most!



Spend time socialising

Some people with problems can cut themselves off from other people and this can make things much worse. Spending time with other people doing ordinary things and chatting can really help you to feel better and put your problems in perspective.

Learning to relax

There are many different ways to do this. For some, it may involve taking up a sport that helps to get the stored up tension out of the body. For others, it can help to learn deep-breathing techniques. Consult your doctor or get information on the Internet about what techniques might suit you.

Helping a friend

Many young people are reluctant to tell anyone when they are upset. Friends are very important at these times and can help by reaching out to someone in need. For example, if you see a friend who looks like they are upset or depressed, you could approach them and ask 'You seem a little down lately. Is something bothering you?' Offering support by listening and helping your friend think of options can be really useful. Don't be afraid to reach out and make the first move.

Getting professional help

Many young people find the prospect of going to a professional such as a counsellor, psychologist or psychiatrist a bit daunting. In some cases they fear that it might mean that there is something seriously wrong or that they are 'going mad'. This is far from the case. The majority of young people who benefit from professional help each year are very normal and go on to have very happy lives. In fact, the young people who seek help early before problems become worse, do better than those who keep the problems to themselves.

Recognising when you need professional help

It is not always easy to know when you should seek support from a friend or when it's time to get professional help. The best gauge is to think about how long you have been feeling low, upset or unhappy. When these feelings last for longer than a few weeks, or when the feelings are seriously interfering with your life, then it is a good idea to talk to somebody outside your friends and family. To access professional help you should talk to someone you trust, such as your parents, teacher or GP, who should be able to arrange it for you.



Possible benefits of professional help

- To talk about the problem and how it may best be solved or treated.
- A counsellor or therapist will be able to help you to understand your worries and anxieties and where they are coming from.
- It can help you to find new ways of thinking about your situation and how to deal more positively with your problems.
- You can learn some coping and problem solving skills, so that it is easier to deal with normal disappointments and future problems.
- Some therapists will also talk to your parents and occasionally your teacher, to help you solve particular home or school problems.

Medication

For some problems, such as depression or anxiety, a doctor may prescribe medication to help you cope. Many young people worry about the side effects of medication and feel unsure about taking it. It is very important that you get all the relevant information and that you talk through all your fears and worries with the doctor. Remember, medication is just another resource to help you to cope, just like a counsellor. It can give you a boost or 'leg up' in dealing with problems such as depression or anxiety. However, it won't 'miraculously' solve your problems. It is still up to you to make it work by taking positive steps to cope.

