

# 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).

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.

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.

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## 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 You may notice, for example that your child is more anxious, or is becoming isolated and withdrawn from friends and family.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.

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## 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, you could speak to their school or college about your concerns as they may be able to offer support such as counselling. If the school or college feel your child needs additional support, they can refer them to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). Read more about CAMHS later. If your child is not comfortable with opening up about their mental health issues with someone from school, you could speak to their GP or paediatrician who can also make a referral to more specialist mental health services.



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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. See Brighton and Hove's Local Offer for more details on CAMHS referrals and treatment ([www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/localoffer](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/localoffer)).

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

### Ask about

- **CAMHS (Children & Adolescent Mental Health Service)** – Referrals should be made by a professional from education, health or social care. You can refer yourself to CAMHS on **01273 718680** but, if you do so, they'll be looking to see if you've tried other, less specialist, services first, such as your school nurse or GP.
- **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**.
- **Community CAMHS** – to talk about your concerns prior to a referral, call the following area-specific numbers: **01273 293481 (East Brighton)**, **01273 290359 (North East Brighton)**, **01273 290545 (Central Brighton and Hove)**, **01273 294411 (West Brighton and Hove)**.
- **IAS: Amaze provides Information, Advice and Support (IAS)** – on health, education, benefits and social care issues for young people with SEN and disabilities and their families in Brighton and Hove. Call Amaze on: **01273 772289** or visit: [www.amazebrighton.org.uk](http://www.amazebrighton.org.uk).
- **Integrated Child Development and Disability Centre at Seaside View** – this is where many children are diagnosed and where health, education and social care professionals can work together to support and treat your child. Assessments will usually be via a health or education professional but you can contact Seaside View directly on: **01273 265780**.
- **Mind Brighton & Hove** – for their mental health advice and information service call: **01273 666950** or email: [info@mindcharity.co.uk](mailto:info@mindcharity.co.uk).
- **Teen to Adult Personal Advisers** - TAPAS support 14-25 year olds with mental health issues. Contact via CAMHS or attend one of their drop-ins at Ovest House, 58 West Street, Weds 3-5pm.

### Further reading and useful links

- **Survival strategies fact sheet** – companion fact sheet from Amaze/Reaching Families with tips on coping with stress and building resilience. See: [www.amazebrighton.org.uk/resources/publications/fact-sheets](http://www.amazebrighton.org.uk/resources/publications/fact-sheets).
- **Brighton & Hove's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy** – [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/health/mental-health-and-wellbeing/our-mental-health-and-wellbeing-strategy](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/health/mental-health-and-wellbeing/our-mental-health-and-wellbeing-strategy).
- **Brighton & Hove's Local Offer** – [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/localoffer](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/localoffer)
- **Mental Health Foundation** – [www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)
- **Mind** – [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)
- **My Life Brighton and Hove ([www.mylifebh.org.uk](http://www.mylifebh.org.uk))** – comprehensive online information about health and social care services in Brighton and Hove.
- **Right Here Brighton and Hove** – volunteer run project that supports young people age 13–25 with mental health issues across Sussex. Call: **07912 479967** or visit: [www.right-here-brightonandhove.org.uk](http://www.right-here-brightonandhove.org.uk).
- **Young Minds** – wide range of information and resources for young people with mental health issues at: [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk). Also runs a parent carer helpline on: **0808 802 5544**.

