

**Subject:**

**Mental Health**

**Name:**

**MENTALITY**

**Class:**

**Off the Record**



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
Working better with you

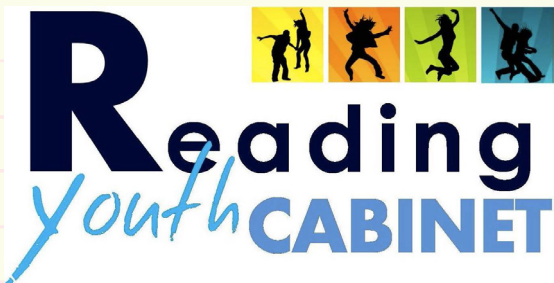
## What is this booklet for?

This booklet is designed to raise your awareness of a few common mental health issues, and to give you some tips and information you can use to look after your own emotional wellbeing. This booklet has been designed for young people by young people.

Reading Borough Council would like to thank OFF THE RECORD (Bristol) and MENTALITY for letting us use their booklet. OFF THE RECORD (Bristol) are a charity offering free mental health support for children and young people aged between 5 and 25 in Bristol.

**MENTALITY** are Evie Price, Shaama Reese, Alicia Litt, Peter White, Charlotte Lacey, Chloe Alsop, Becky Curley, Eric Brook, Charlotte Watts, Isla Simpson-Sedgwick, Akira Waggett, Sophia Doughty, Kate Macmin, Felicity Hathway, Megan Gardiner. Special thanks to Liz Small from BARNARDO'S and Felicity Hathaway for the illustrations!

This booklet is supported in Reading by our Primary Mental Health Workers (PMHWs), part of the Children's Action Teams. PMHWs support the wellbeing needs of young people by intervening early before issues become too great and can support any wellbeing need. The PMHW team conducted research into the best interventions for young people and identified this booklet as one of the most informative and complete guides. Every secondary school child in Reading will receive a copy.



**Hi,**

we as Reading Youth Cabinet, who are here to represent you, present this leaflet on mental health. Many of you may want to throw this away, but why not read it on your way home? Mental health issues may not affect you now, but it's possible they may in the future, or very possibly someone you know. It's important that, if you or someone you know are experiencing issues, you talk to someone about this – don't keep it to yourself – why not take advantage of the text number below? We hope you find this useful.

**Text: 07537 414757**

**Email: [wellbeing@reading.gov.uk](mailto:wellbeing@reading.gov.uk)**

The service is available until the end of the summer term 2015. You will get a reply within 48 hours from a professional with lots of experience in health and wellbeing and working with young people. After summer 2015, contact Reading's Time to Talk youth counselling service. **tel:** 0118 903 5151; **text:** 07891 052333; **email:** [timetotalk@adviza.org.uk](mailto:timetotalk@adviza.org.uk); **web:** [www.timetotalkreading.org.uk](http://www.timetotalkreading.org.uk) or [www.readingyouth.com](http://www.readingyouth.com)

# What is Mental Health?

Mental health is about how we feel, think and behave.

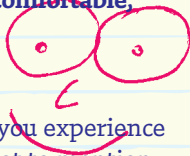
Remember, we all know how important it is to look after our physical health, so why should it be any different with our mental health?

Sometimes it can be helpful to think of good mental health as:

- **Having confidence in yourself and your abilities**
- **Being able to express your emotions, both the positive and the negative**
- **Feeling good about who you are and your identity**
- **Being able to bounce back when you encounter any difficulties**
- **Being able to learn new things and develop**
- **Having good relationships where we feel comfortable, happy and able to trust people**

## Don't Worry!

Life is sometimes tough. When you're young you experience a number of challenges and changes in life, not to mention your body. There can be a lot to feel worried about, and things like exams and careers, school, college, friends, relationships, our identity and independence can all stress us out. We all go through times when we feel stressed out and worried about stuff - life is always going to have ups and downs. But we can learn ways to take care of ourselves, so even when things are stressful we can still cope.



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# **STRESS**



## **What is stress?**

We all go through times when we feel stressed out and worried about stuff. **Stress is something that happens in everyone's life.** It can be triggered by stuff like:

- **Living up to people's expectations of us. Feeling pressure at school, college or work to fit in and do well.**
- **Unhappy events like our parents splitting up or a big change like moving to a new school.**
- **Grief and loss when someone close to us dies or moves away.**
- **Being bullied.**

**A little stress can be a good thing;** it can be a positive force that helps us achieve our goals. **But stress is a problem when it feels greater than our ability to cope.**

## **Stress & your emotions**

**Stress affects us all differently.** Some common ways it can affect us include:

- **Feeling anxious and worried**
- **Feeling sad and tearful**
- **Getting angry and snapping at people**
- **You might find you lose your appetite, or you might eat more than normal.**
- **Concentrating can be difficult.**
- **It can also be difficult to sleep when we are stressed.**

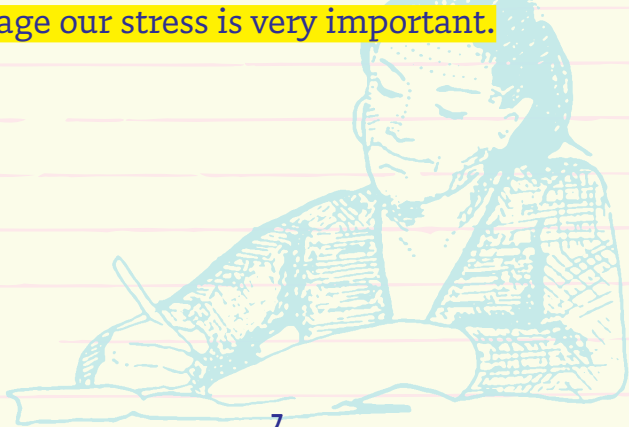


## Stress & your body

When we experience stress the 'fight or flight' response is triggered in us. This is where chemicals (like adrenaline) are released from a part of the brain which prepares the body to either 'fight' or 'run away' from something that is a threat to us. This is a physical reaction and some common ways you might experience this include:

- **Your heart rate and breathing increase**
- **You may get physical pains like a headache or stomach ache.**

Being stressed for a long time can lead to a whole range of health problems, and so shouldn't be taken lightly! The way we manage our stress is very important.





## **Stress busting tips!**

**Recognise the problem!** Write it down and think about how you can tackle the problem.

**Phone a friend.** Talk to someone you trust – a problem shared is a problem halved! Having a rant can be really useful sometimes!

**Chillax!** Do something relaxing to clear your head.

**Crank It Up!** Do something like listen to loud music.

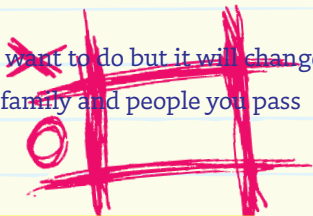
**Plan your day.** Write a list of the things you need to do and put them in order of priority.

**Try something new,** or teach someone else something new.

**Treat yourself!** Go shopping for a bargain.

**Exercise.** Do something you enjoy like swimming, dancing or football.

**Smile!** It might be last thing you want to do but it will change your mood. Smile at your friends, family and people you pass on the street.



**It's really important you don't ignore how you're feeling.** Stress can build up, especially if what's causing it doesn't go away.

For more info ➡ [www.stress.org.uk](http://www.stress.org.uk)



# ANGER

## What is anger?

Getting angry sometimes is totally normal. We all find stuff in life that makes us angry. When our anger is used carefully and constructively it can be a powerful force for helping us to get our voices heard and make changes in our lives for the better. But just because anger is a normal emotion, it doesn't mean that it's easy to cope with. It can be really uncomfortable to talk about and many of us find it hard to express it openly. Some of the harmful ways that people deal with their anger include:

- shouting at people,
- breaking stuff and throwing things,
- hurting other people physically and emotionally,
- harming themselves

Although these ways of dealing with our anger and frustration might make us feel better at the time, we may come to regret them especially if we end up hurting ourselves or the people that we care about.

Anger can:

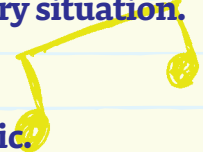


- **Make you upset and frustrated**
- **Feel like you have a knot in your stomach**
- **Give you sweaty palms**
- **Make you feel hot-headed**

In the long-run, **feeling angry all the time does us no good,** and has been linked with mental health problems like depression, anxiety and self-harm.

## ***Tips on staying calm***

- **Take yourself out of the situation – walk away.**
- **Find a safe place where you can vent.**
- **Throwing a tennis ball at a wall or meditating in your bedroom can be a good way to calm down after an angry situation.**
- **Shout into a pillow!**
- **Go for a walk**
- **Listen to your favourite music.**



For more info ➡ [www.angermanage.co.uk](http://www.angermanage.co.uk)

# Depression

## What is depression?

We all have times when we feel low, upset or unhappy.

Sometimes we know why we feel this way and other times we have no idea, we're just having 'one of those days'. Sometimes we use the word 'depressed' to describe how we're feeling, but depression is something different from an everyday case of the 'blues'; it's when we have these feelings for weeks or even months and it begins to affect our day to day lives.

## What causes depression?

It's natural to go through a time of feeling low after something upsetting has happened. After the death of someone close to you or going through a big upheaval like your parents splitting up you are likely to feel sadness and grief at the change and loss. If you feel stuck in those feelings and can't move on from them then this can be a sign you are depressed.



## What does depression feel like?

Depression affects the way that you think and feel about things. It also affects the way that you behave and has a physical effect on your body. This can include:

- Feeling an overwhelming sadness, guilt, anger and/or hopelessness
- Feeling numb
- Feeling you are not worth anything
- Becoming more self-critical
- Blaming yourself
- Being more prone to illness
- Headaches
- Stomach upsets

### 'CHEER ME UP' BOX

This is a box that is special and individual to you. It is a tool to help you improve your mood. Buy or make a box. In this box place items that will help you feel better. Like a few Sudoku puzzles, or one small chocolate bar. Be careful of pictures; make sure they only bring back happy memories! Every time you feel low, take a look in the box.

You could also make a playlist on your iPod or a CD full of upbeat songs that always make you smile. If you're feeling low, then just press play!

For more info ➡ [www.depressionalliance.org](http://www.depressionalliance.org)

# ANXIETY



## What is anxiety?

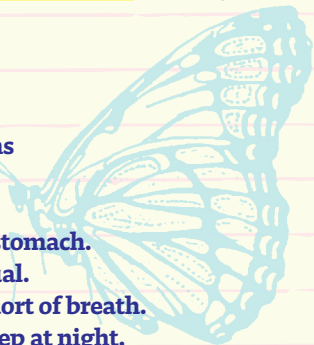
We have times in our lives when we feel worried about a particular event or about something new we have to do. There are times when a little pressure can actually be a good thing because it motivates us to deal with the challenges life throws at us, but too much can lead to us feeling overwhelmed by anxiety and unable to cope.

Sometimes there will be an obvious cause to the anxiety you are feeling. You might have an exam coming up, or a job interview that is really worrying you. When the event has passed, the anxiety goes away. For some people though, the feeling stays with them, even though they don't know why.

## What does anxiety feel like?

Anxiety can affect you in lots of different ways, you might feel:

- Fearful and worried.
- Nervous, restless and edgy.
- Irritable, angry and impatient.
- It's really hard to make decisions
- It difficult to concentrate
- Your heart racing.
- A 'knot' or 'butterflies' in your stomach.
- You might sweat more than usual.
- You may be trembling or feel short of breath.
- You might find it difficult to sleep at night.



10...9...8...7...

## Tips to help you cope with anxiety

These suggestions can help distract you, but really **anything you can do to relax yourself**, from breathing deeply and more slowly to visualising a space where you feel safe in your head can help.

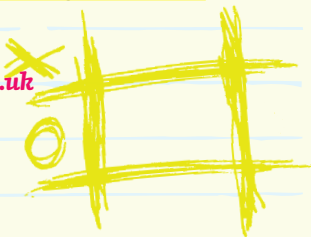
- **Count backwards from as high a number as you can.**

- **Focus on an object in the room and describe it to yourself as fully as possible, using all your senses – what does it look like, feel like, smell like and so on.**

### THE WORRY BOX

Get yourself or make yourself a box. Write down on some post-it-notes your different worries. Next, put the worries you can't do anything about into the box and tell yourself you can deal with those later. Decide which ones you can do something about now, prioritise them and start taking small steps to tackle these worries.

For more info ➡ [www.anxietyuk.org.uk](http://www.anxietyuk.org.uk)



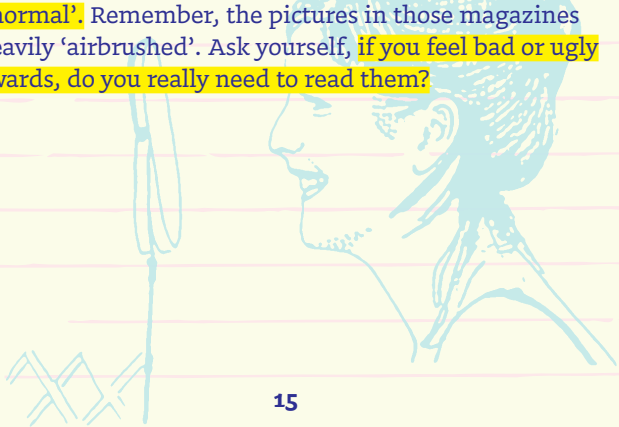
# BODY IMAGE

## What is my body image?

Body image is part of self esteem, it is how you think and feel about the way you look and how other people see you. To be confident with our bodies can be very hard when there are so many changes happening to us, and so many social influences telling us how we should look. However, it is important that you know there is no one 'right' way of looking. We are all different shapes, sizes and colours. Enjoy who you are because we are all unique.

## The media & body image

Ever feel not so good about your body after looking at the models and celebrities in a glossy magazine? Research has shown that the media plays an important role in shaping our attitudes to our bodies and what we think is attractive and 'normal'. Remember, the pictures in those magazines are heavily 'airbrushed'. Ask yourself, if you feel bad or ugly afterwards, do you really need to read them?



## Body image and eating problems

Food plays a big part in our lives: not only is it essential for our health and development, but sharing food and eating with one another can have an important role in how we socialise and spend time together. Sometimes our body image can affect our behaviour and relationship to food for the worse.

Certain ways of controlling the food we eat can become very serious and interfere with our ability to enjoy life as well as our physical health. Over or under eating, making yourself sick, or only eating a really limited group of foods can all be signs of a more serious eating problem like Anorexia or Bulimia.

It's important to recognise when your relationship to food has become unhealthy in these ways. When our eating habits are causing us to worry or we feel that we need to keep them a secret then it's a good idea to talk to someone we trust.

## A way to boost body confidence

Next time you look in a mirror, instead of looking at what you don't like about your body, say out loud three positive things about your body. Then every time you look at a mirror remember these positives.

For more info ➡ [www.b-eat.co.uk](http://www.b-eat.co.uk)



# Relationships

We've already mentioned that part of **having good mental health** is about being able to make and keep relationships with people you care about. Some relationships are better for us than others though, and our self-esteem can often determine the types of relationship we end up in, whether that's with a friend, parent, teacher, boyfriend or girlfriend.

## Healthy & unhealthy relationships

Any good, healthy relationship is one that involves mutual respect, honesty, trust, emotional support and good communication. A good relationship strengthens your resilience and mental health.

An unhealthy relationship is one that doesn't make us feel good about ourselves, or one that makes us feel uncomfortable or unhappy.



\*Illustration by Felicity Hatfield

## Abusive relationships

An abusive relationship can include physical abuse, like throwing objects, hitting, kicking, or slapping. It could include sexual abuse – for example forcing you to perform a sexual act you don't want to do, or it could include emotional abuse. This means controlling or intimidating behaviour, verbal abuse, bullying and stalking. This can happen in person, by text, email or through social networking sites.

If you think you are in an abusive relationship, it's important that you know you are not alone and that there is help out there. Here are some tips on keeping your relationships healthy:

- Relationships should make you feel good and safe
- If you're worried, tell a trusted adult what's going on and ask for their help.
- Relationships can be scary and this may make us want other people to act in a way that is not appropriate.
- Just because you're 16 doesn't mean you have to have, or should expect, sex.
- In a relationship it's important and healthy to have time apart from one another, as well as time for just the two of you.
- Never put personal details like your phone number or address on social networking sites.
- If you're being bullied on social media, tell someone, block the person from making comments on your page and change your privacy settings.

For more info ➡ [www.relate.org.uk/relationship-help/help-children-and-young-people](http://www.relate.org.uk/relationship-help/help-children-and-young-people)

# HOW TO LOOK AFTER YOURSELF...

**\* HERE ARE SOME MORE TIPS FOR MANAGING TRICKY OR STRESSFUL SITUATIONS.**



# Exam Stress Busting Tips!

## BEFORE YOUR EXAM

- Write a revision timetable to keep track of exams and revision times
- Talk to your subject teachers if there is something you don't understand
- Take time out of revising to relax. 40 minutes revising should be followed by a 15 minute break. This break will refresh you.
- Plan things to look forward to after your exams.
- Make sure you get enough sleep, exercise and eat regular meals. This is really important.

## ON THE DAY OF YOUR EXAM

- On the morning of your exam get up 15 minutes earlier to get ready.
- Last minute cramming does not work; it will lead to more stress.
- Go to the toilet before!
- Have a bottle of water with you.

## AFTER YOUR EXAM

- Try not to worry, focus your energy on something else that you enjoy.
- If you don't get the results you were hoping for, there are always other options.

# The Miracle Question



Our imagination can be a powerful tool in helping us overcome difficult situations and problems. Try this visualisation exercise:

Close your eyes and imagine that you have gone to sleep and woken up. Overnight a miracle has happened and it is now one year in the future and your problem has been solved. In as much detail as you can answer the following questions:

- What is the first thing you notice that tells you this miracle has happened? Use all your senses (smell, sounds, touch, feelings) to answer this.
- When you get out of bed, how do you feel different?
- What happens through the day?
- How do people treat you differently?

Now, with this image in your mind, look at where you are now, and think about the first few small steps you can realistically take to get to the miracle day you imagined.

## Breathing Exercises

Focusing on our breathing can be a good way of calming us down and thinking more clearly. Try these techniques:

- Breathe normally and really focus on where your breath is coming from. Feel the air enter and leave your body, and concentrate on this feeling.

- You could also try breathing in for five seconds so it feels like you are taking air all the way into your stomach. Hold it for five seconds and then breathe out for five seconds. Repeat this until you feel calm again.

## Using alcohol & drugs to cope

It can be tempting to use alcohol and drugs to help cope with difficult situations or hide painful feelings. But this is never an answer to life's problems, and it will end up having a worse effect on your mental and physical health in the end. If your feelings are overwhelming you, talk to someone you trust.

## How to help a friend

- Try to focus on making them feel better about themselves and not on the problems they are having.

- Don't gossip about their problems and remind them how much you value them as a friend.

- Include them in stuff you are doing, like skating, shopping or just hanging out. Even if they let you down, keep asking them whenever you do something. It's important they don't feel alone.

- Tell them all the things you really like about them as a person and friend.

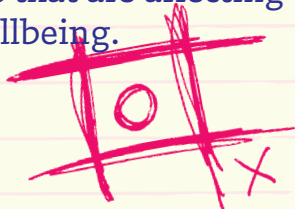
- Make sure you look after yourself too. For example, do not copy their behaviour to be supportive, as this could make you unwell.

- Don't force them to do anything they don't want to do.

- If they're not already getting help, encourage them to do so. Show them a website or leaflet that could help.

- If you are really worried, tell an adult you can trust.

Remember, how you support and treat your friend is also how you should treat yourself if you're faced with problems that are affecting your mental health and wellbeing.



## Where to find help

If you find any of the issues in this book affecting your life, text a mental health professional now in total confidence.

**Text: 07537 414757**

**Email: [wellbeing@reading.gov.uk](mailto:wellbeing@reading.gov.uk)**

The service is available until the end of the summer term 2015. You will get a reply within 48 hours from a professional with lots of experience in health and wellbeing and working with young people. After summer 2015, contact Reading's Time to Talk youth counselling service. **tel:** 0118 903 5151; **text:** 07891 052333; **email:** [timetotalk@adviza.org.uk](mailto:timetotalk@adviza.org.uk); **web:** [www.timetotalkreading.org.uk](http://www.timetotalkreading.org.uk) or [www.readingyouth.com](http://www.readingyouth.com)

\*Although we think the websites in this booklet are useful and full of good information, Reading Borough Council can't be held responsible for their content.