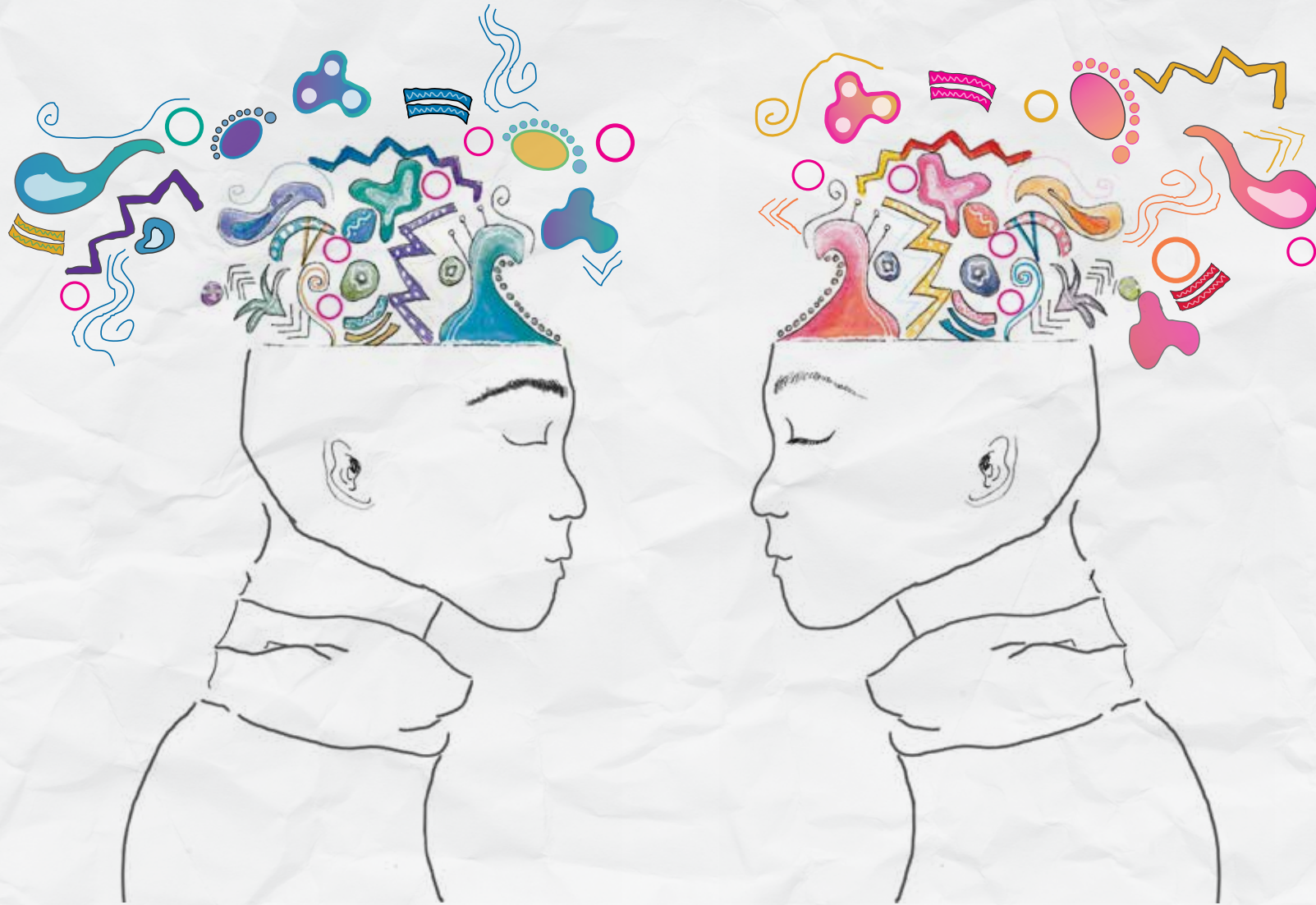


MENTAL HEALTH LIFEHACKS

for supporting friends with their mental health

Written by young people for young people



For more information please visit: cypsomersethealth.org/lifehacks

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We believe that mental health is something we do not something we have. It's about doing things that help keep us well and happy, or that help us feel better when things are tough. We've come up with some tried and tested LifeHacks to help us to help ourselves and other young people. Now we want to share them with you too.

To see some more information and even more LifeHacks please visit:

cypsomersethealth.org/lifehacks

1 Look after yourself first

It's important to put yourself first. The only way you will be able to support your friend is if you feel strong enough. Don't take it all on by yourself. Seek help if you need it, or don't know what to do.

True Story



Sometimes my friends would confide in me about their mental health issues, sometimes that was okay if I was okay, but when I wasn't I needed to direct them somewhere different i.e. School counsellor or a parent to make sure I didn't take too much on. It's okay if you don't feel like you're not the right person to help them at that time."

Young person



TIPS AND TRICKS

Check out our LifeHacks to look after your own mental health. Talk to a trusted adult if you're worried that you're finding it hard to cope.

Go to the **find out more** page for website links and useful apps.

2 Don't judge - try to keep an open mind

If you see your friend struggling, it's important that they don't feel judged or have their feelings dismissed; they are still your friend – they just happen to be going through a rough time and need your friendship just like before.

TIPS AND TRICKS

Keep doing what you would normally do with your friend.

Go to the [find out more](#) page for website links and useful apps.

True Story

I tend to push people away because of trust and abandonment issues from past friendships, and sometimes I don't believe they actually like me. However, I'm proved wrong because they are persistent and supportive no matter what. The most valuable thing was that they treated me as they always had, and kept in contact with me... even when I was trying to hide away."

Young person

3 Make time to listen

It can be hard to listen properly if you're distracted or there's lots going on. Creating a space to listen to how your friend is feeling will help them feel heard and valued. Choose a place you know they will feel safe and comfortable to talk.

True Story

“It made such a difference to me to have a friend that just listens. Even the silence was okay when I found it hard to talk. All my friends are patient and really understanding, because they know sometimes I will just say ‘I’m fine’ or ‘I’m just tired’ when really I’m not and they know that. They also know I will talk in my own time about how I’m feeling, although if they do know they will always ask twice.”

Young person

TIPS AND TRICKS

Remember that what your friend is saying might be difficult. It is important to try and keep things confidential unless you have a serious reason for concern. Your friend will be grateful to have a listening ear.

Go to the [find out more](#) page for website links and useful apps.



4 Learn more about mental health

Learning about mental health and the specific issue your friend is experiencing will help you give the right support. You could help your friend research online.



TIPS AND TRICKS

Look at our LifeHacks for supporting your mental health and try to put some of them into practice for you and your friends.

Go to the [find out more](#) page for website links and useful apps.

True Story

“Because I made the choice to find out about anxiety, I was able to ask better questions. My friend didn’t have to explain so much.”

Young person

5 Spend time with them doing fun stuff



Creative or relaxing activities can really boost mental health. Find some things to do together that your friend might enjoy. But remember to check in that your friend is genuinely comfortable with the activities and not going along with you to keep you happy.

TIPS AND TRICKS

Do something that you and a friend enjoy such as going out together, into town or to the park or a café.

Go to the [find out more](#) page for website links and useful apps.

True Story

I go horse-riding weekly with a couple of friends which is fun because we go exploring for new places to ride. It makes me feel good because we're learning new skills and talking together"

Young person age 14

6 Encourage healthy choices

Motivate your friend to look after themselves by encouraging them to eat healthily, do some exercise and get enough sleep. All these things can improve their mood. However this doesn't mean treats should be banned as treats can also make you feel good (mmmm chocolate)! It's also a good idea to help them avoid drugs and alcohol as these can have a negative effect on mental health.

True Story

“My friend was upset, depressed, they decided not to eat as they were not hungry and were not happy with their appearance. I took them to our form tutor who we are quite close to. We had an informal conversation and from there I shared food with them at lunch times and helped them to make healthy choices.”

Young person age 15

TIPS AND TRICKS

You could go for a walk or swim together, make and eat fresh fruit salads or smoothies, and try to encourage them to get enough sleep.

Go to the **find out more** page for website links and useful apps.



7 Don't let their mental health issues dominate

It's really important that you treat them as you have always done. They're still your friend despite their issues. Sometimes it's good just to hang out like old friends and talk about other things, not just their problems. If their mental health starts to affect your own mental health then it is okay to put yourself first and talk to an adult you trust.

True Story

I had a friendship with someone that was based on our shared experience of mental health. For a long time, all we talked about was my friend's mental health and it felt like the only thing we had in common. Every time we talked, it was all about him. Now we've worked through it and when we get together we talk about all the other things we both enjoy."

Young person

TIPS AND TRICKS

Remind yourselves of your friendship. Why not make a memory book or scrapbook together? It'll give you a chance to talk about all the reasons why you're friends, what you really like about each other and what you have in common. You also build memories to look back on.

Go to the [find out more](#) page for website links and useful apps.

8 Let them know you are thinking about them

Letting your friend know that you care can really boost their mood and stop them from feeling isolated. Try not to go on about their problems too much and maybe focus on positive conversations that you both enjoy. This will take their mind off everything that is going on.

True Story

Sometimes when I feel as if my friends and I have become distant or not spoken recently, I tag them in a post on social media to bring up happy memories and to re-build a connection. It makes my friends feel happy that their friends are thinking about them”

Young Person age 15

TIPS AND TRICKS

Keep in touch with them using social media or even go old-school and write them letters or send them a silly postcard to make them laugh. Send them a gift, or simply ask if they're okay. You could also download the Moodbug app for you to share your moods with each other.

Go to the [find out more](#) page for website links and useful apps.

9 Be aware of changes to their mood



Keep an eye on changes in your friend's emotions and offer support if you think they are struggling. Do ask for help from a trusted adult if you're concerned or have more positive conversations about what they like so that their mood can be raised.

TIPS AND TRICKS

Help them keep a mood diary or journal so that they can keep track of how they're feeling day to day. Lots of Organisations provide templates for mood diaries and journals. Have a search online.

Go to the [find out more](#) page for website links and useful apps.

True Story

“When my friend comes round to see me, I know what mood my friend is in as soon as she walks in. I give her a hug and ask her if she is okay. I feel like I want to ask her if she wants to stay the night and nearly the whole time she is round we lay with our heads on one another.”

Young person age 20

10 Encourage your friend to talk to someone

You don't need to support your friend alone. Your friend may benefit from talking to a trusted adult (e.g. parent, GP, teacher, youth worker or a mental health professional) and may need help finding that person. Be a friend by helping them identify and talk to that person.

Remember! If you feel your friend is at risk of serious harm then you should not be dealing with it on your own. See the final pages of this booklet for details on all the immediate telephone and online support available to you. Always call 999 if there is an emergency.

True Story

I noticed a change in my friend's mood and behaviors. I asked if they were okay and said that I had noticed they had stopped talking as much and they seemed sad a lot of the time. They said they had a lot on their mind and didn't know how to start talking about it. I said they can talk to me or suggested a teacher / family member. I said they would start to feel better if they spoke to someone but they should do it when they feel ready."

Young person

TIPS AND TRICKS

Trusted adults are an important first port of call for help around mental health issues. Help your friend use the DocReady website to prepare for an appointment to discuss their mental health. You could also go with them for support.

Go to the [find out more](#) page for website links and useful apps.

Find out more

YOU CAN CONTACT ANY OF THE ORGANISATIONS BELOW FOR ADVICE OR SUPPORT FOR YOURSELF OR YOUR FRIEND.

CHILDLINE

Childline offers free and confidential help for young people in the UK 24/7. You can call free on 0800 1111, speak to a counsellor online or visit the explore section on their website for information and advice on a range of topics.
www.childline.org.uk

SAMARITANS

Samaritans offers free and confidential help in the UK 24/7, you don't have to be suicidal to get in touch. You can call free on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org or visit a local Somerset Samaritans Branch.
www.samaritans.org

THE MIX

The Mix offers free and confidential support to the under 25s. They offer a free helpline 08088 084994 available 11am-11pm every day. Email and webchat support are available at their website. They can also offer a free telephone counselling service.
www.themix.org.uk

YOUTH WELBEING DIRECTORY

The Youth Wellbeing Directory provides a list of local and national organisations for anyone up the age of 25 to find support, along with important information you may find helpful.
www.annafreud.org/children-young-people/youth-wellbeing/

This worksheet from **Moodjuice** is really helpful for challenging negative thoughts. [Moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk](http://moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk) Locally there is Creative Somerset events page for activities that you might be interested in getting involved in.
www.creativesomerset.com

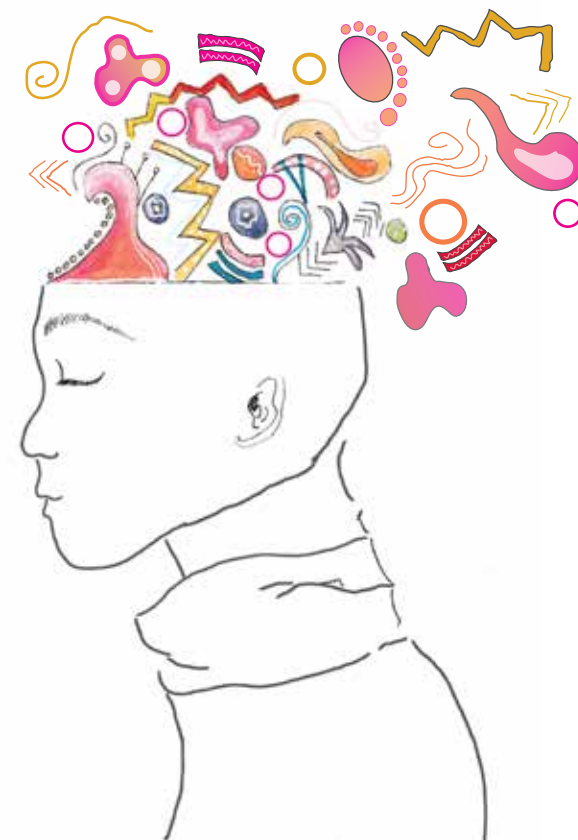
This link has more information on finding the right work-life balance for you, which could be especially helpful if you have exams coming up.
www.schools.nsw.edu.au/gotoschool/highschool/balance.php

Download the free **Headspace Take 10** app which teaches you mindfulness and meditation.
www.headspace.com/how-it-works

The **Young Minds** website has more useful information about talking to your friends about your mental health.
youngminds.org.uk/take-time-out

Mood Cafe provides a range of podcasts to listen to about mental health and nutrition, sleep, exercise and relaxation.
www.moodcafe.co.uk/mental-health-info/mental-health-foundation-podcasts.aspx

The **Rethink Young People's Toolkit** Has an activity on 'Preparing to Talk'.
www.rethink.org/living-with-mental-illness/young-people/young-peoples-toolkit-to-support-your-mental-health



IN AN EMERGENCY YOU SHOULD ALWAYS RING 999 OR 111