



How can parents and carers support young people with their mental health?



Our target audience for our questionnaire was young people aged from 11-19 years old.

We wanted to research how children and young people feel they are supported by their parents and carers and how they think parents and carers could support them in different ways.

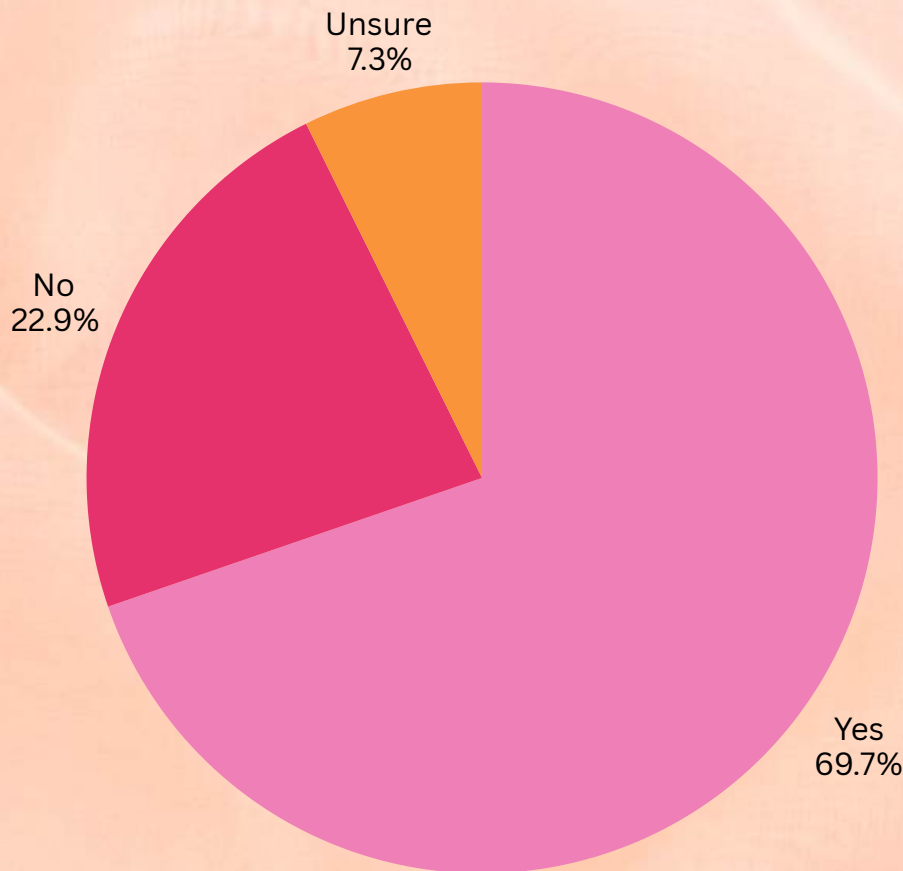
We created the questions to help inform parents and carers and offer suggestions to them to help strengthen relationships between themselves and young people. We understand that it can sometimes be difficult to understand young peoples mental health difficulties and our aim is that from the research that we have conducted and the data we have collected, parents will feel more informed to support young people with their mental health.

For our first two questions, we collected data on the gender and age of the individuals answering. Of the 113 people who have answered our questionnaire, 23% people identified as male, 72% people identified as female and 4% people identified as non-binary.

Out of the 113 people, 2% are aged 11, 5% are 13, 11% are 14, 25% are 15, 23% are 16, 16% are 17, 6% aged 18 and 2% are 19.



Have you spoken to your parent/carers about your mental health?



Young persons feedback: 'My dad doesn't talk about how he is feeling, how does he expect me to talk about mine?'

What we think:

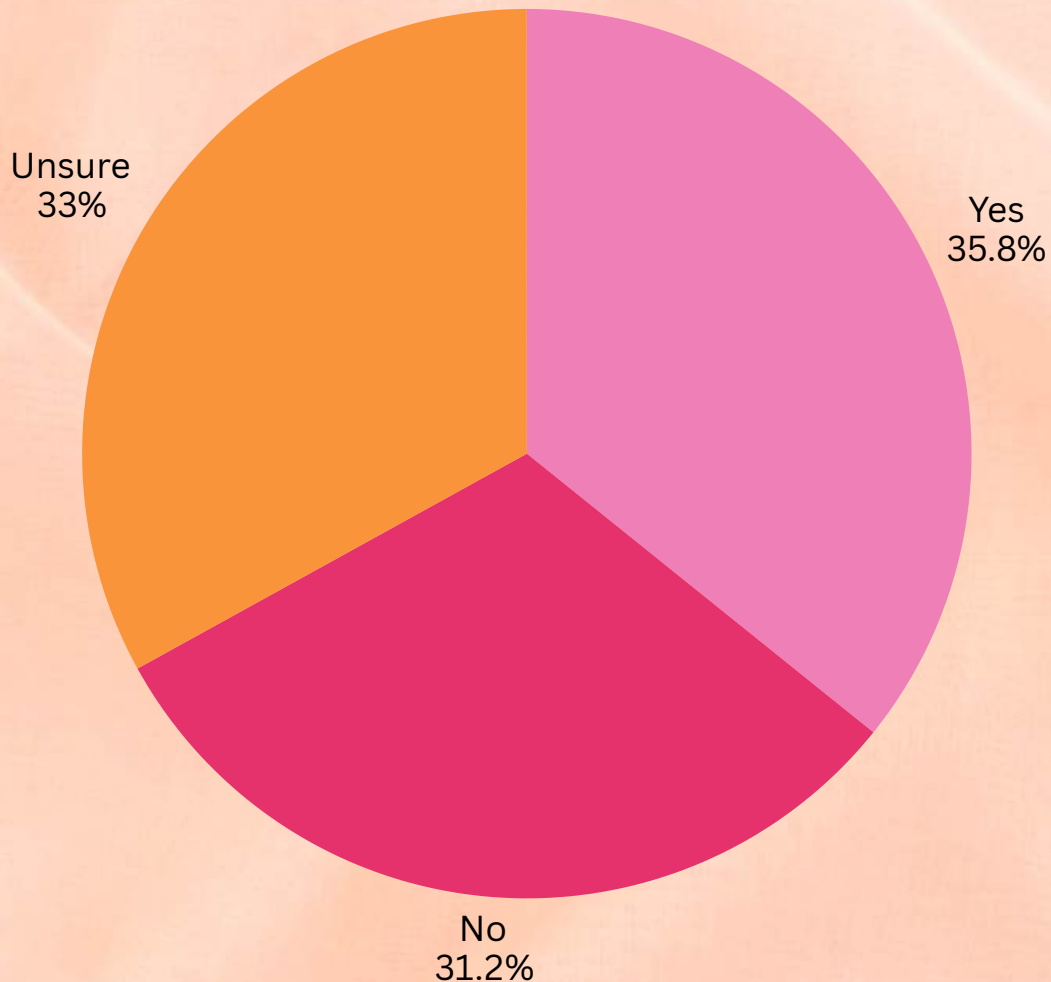
It would be helpful if young people felt comfortable around their parent/carers to talk about their mental health and that parents/carers are able to create open and honest conversations

To do this, we suggest they could:

- Initiate conversations about their own mental health (how they're feeling)
- Help their young person initiate conversations about mental health
- Validate their own feelings as well as listen to and validate their young persons feelings

QUESTION 4

Do you think that your parent/carer understands your mental health?

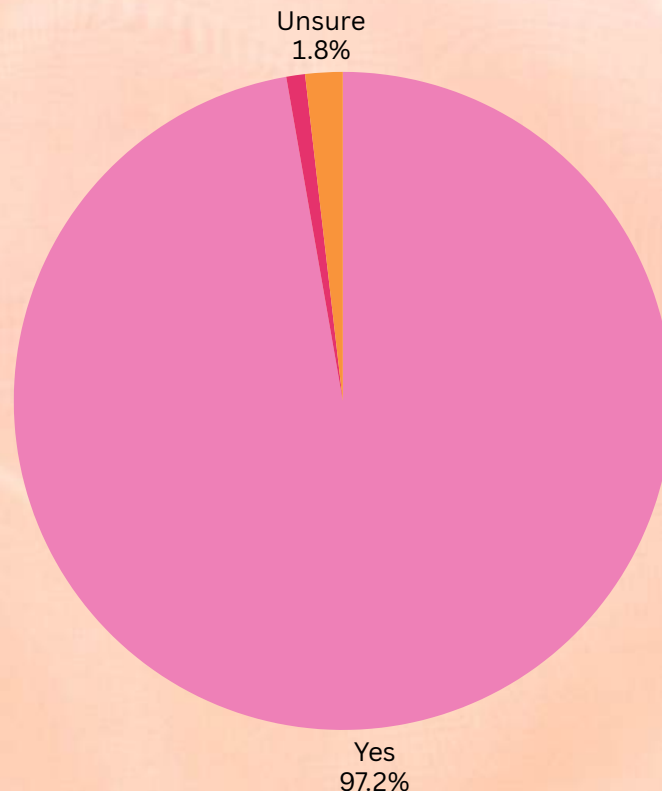


What we think:

More young people are unsure or feel that they know for certain that their parents do not understand their mental health than those who do.

To understand your young persons mental health better, it may be helpful to look out for any changes in their normal behaviour or routine (see page 14). The best thing to do is to ask your young person directly about their mental health and let them know that you will do your best to understand how they feel. We think that by doing this, young people will know that you see their emotional changes as valid.

Do you think that there should be support for parents/carers to help them support young people with their mental health?



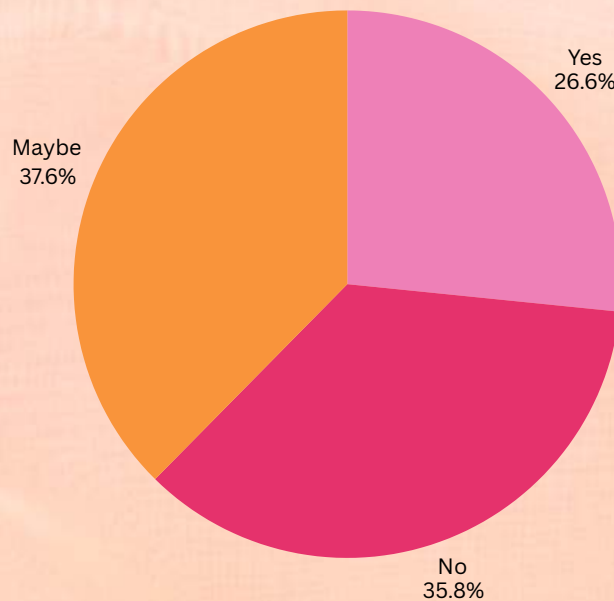
What we think:

Parents/carers should have support to understand what their child is going through so they are able to help their child with their mental health.

We feel that young people would immensely benefit from their parent(s)/carer(s) getting support as the young person may then feel understood and comfortable sharing their struggles. The idea is that the support parents/carers receive, will help strengthen the bond with their young people, as it can create a stronger understanding and connection.

Examples of support you can get can be as simple as talking to other parents/carers of young people from a similar age range so you know you are not alone. You can also ask for support from your young person's teachers or other significant adults in their life. At The Relationships Centre, we also run our Prosper Parent Programme to support parents/carers in supporting their young people with mental health difficulties such as anxiety and low mood. There are also websites available that offer advice and support (see page 16).

Do you feel comfortable talking to your parent/carer about your mental health?



What we think:

‘Yes’ shows us that a lot of families are making sure that discussing mental health is a comfortable conversation to have. However, the majority do not feel, or are unsure whether they feel comfortable with mental health conversations with their parents and carers.

We asked what parents/carers do to make their children comfortable talking about their mental health. **48%** answered it is their parents listening to them. Practise active listening at home, this means being fully present in the conversation, by;

- Showing interest by practicing good eye contact.
- Not thinking about how you are going to reply or what to say next, just listen to what they are saying.
- Asking open-ended questions to encourage further responses.
- Paraphrasing and reflecting back on what has been said.

Some responses from young people included:

My mum is very nice to everyone so she's nice to me and she's accepting of everyone so there is no judgement.

They listen to my problems and can understand where I am coming from. They don't put too much pressure on me when something is wrong and let me take it at a good pace.

Explained to me that they were there to talk without pressuring me. Constant reassurance with physical affection rather than a one time passing comment.

Says that I am free to talk to them whenever I need to.

Listen and are not dismissive.

Leave me be, then I feel better coming to them to talk.

Reassure me by letting me know it's going to be okay and letting me make my own decisions.

Listens intently and remembers what works and what doesn't for me personally.

They don't judge me.

Lots of hugs, reassuring words and giving me time to talk about it at my own pace.

They usually spot the warning signs before me so they let me know.

My mum, in particular, has done a bit of research into things as she started to take it more seriously. I think it's really important when parents take mental health issues as a serious problem.

What we think:

By asking young people what their parents/carers did that made them feel comfortable enough to open up about their mental health, it let us see that all young people are different and whilst some people may need space from others when dealing with mental health difficulties, some may need extra quality time and care. We therefore think what is really important to young people is that parents/carers ask them what they need in terms of support and to actively listen to and do what it is their young person says they need. This creates the opportunity to strengthen the bond between them and their young people, enabling meaningful conversations, stronger connections and a better understanding and empathy for what they are experiencing.

We think validation is really important. You may not always agree with the view of your young person but listening without judgement can validate their feelings and make them feel heard.

This is what The Relationships Centre's Prosper Programme says about validation:

- Validation communicates to another person that their feelings, thoughts, and actions make sense and are understandable to you in a particular situation.
- Self-validation involves perceiving your own feelings, thoughts and actions as making sense, accurate, and acceptable in a particular situation.

Phrases that could validate your young persons feelings:

I understand things are difficult right now, can you tell me about it?

I've noticed you don't seem happy right now, can we talk about what's happening for you and how you are feeling?

I'm sorry that you are struggling right now, what may help?

Are you ok? You seem worried.

You don't seem yourself; how can we make things better for you?



Ways in which parents/carers can open conversations:

Going out for a walk, or long drive: sometimes face to face conversations can feel unintentionally intimidating.

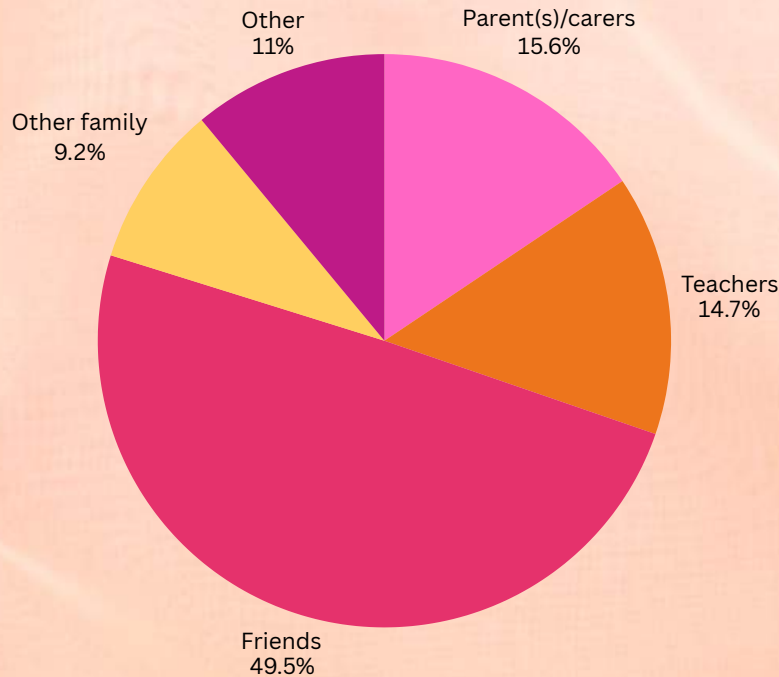
Arrange to do an activity together: playing board games, going on an outing, doing some craft together.

Talk about something you know they enjoy or are interested in.

Notice when they are open to receiving physical reassurance, hugs.

Focus on the positive, not the negative.

Who are you most likely to go for support with your mental health?



What we think:

Many young people feel like they are most comfortable with someone of similar age and someone they believe they share similar struggles with, which makes them feel like they can trust them with their problems.

Do not worry if you feel your young person is not coming to you as they may just be going to their friend instead.

The young people who do go to their parents for support have listed reasons including:

‘Because my mum has let me know that she is there for me and is consistently reliable and supportive’

‘I trust my parents and I know if I tell them something they won't tell anyone’

‘My mum is completely non-judgemental and I feel very safe telling her a lot about what goes on in my mind.’

From this, we can see why the young people who go to their parents do so due to them creating a safe, non-judgemental space where they feel understood and listened to.

Some responses from young people who responded 'friends' included:

They are more likely to understand since me and my friends have the same goals and aspiration.

They understand my struggles more as they have/are experiencing the same.

Friends are easier to see and tell about issues in school.

I feel like friends have more experience in relevant, modern issues for young people than adults, who are more solution oriented when it comes to mental health problems rather than understanding.

As they won't worry as much.

My friends are more likely to understand how I'm feeling, and advise me on whether I need to talk to a parent.

Can relate more as we're closer in age and are going through similar things.

I feel like I can be more honest with friends because I don't want to tell my parents everything that is going on with me because I feel that they might judge or not fully understand but my friends wouldn't.

Because I feel that my friends have a more personal way of helping me. If I told my parents, they might take action on it that I don't want them to and I don't want them to worry that much. I feel that friends know me better than my parents.

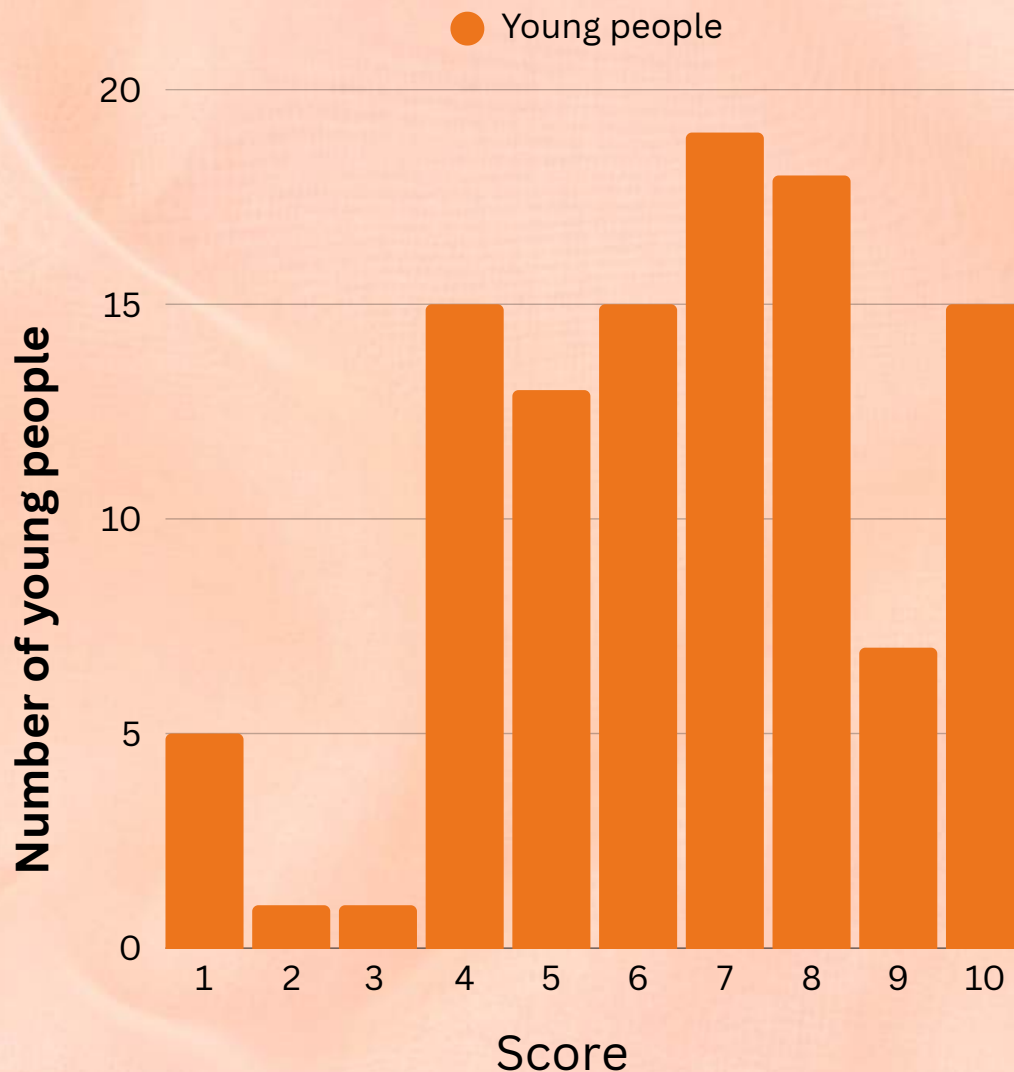
Some responses from young people who responded 'teachers':

I see my teachers everyday for most of the day so you have a good relationship with them, which makes it easy to talk to them.

I think teachers are able to support me the most because they can do things about it when I am in school and that is when I am struggling the most.

I would go to the welfare staff at college as they give more supportive advice. They take matters more seriously most of the time and are sympathetic.

- How much interest does your parent/carer show in your mental health? 1 is no interest at all and 10 is a lot of interest



What we think:

Most of the young people who answered our questionnaire, felt their parents/carers had shown interest. We think a good way to show interest in your young persons mental health is by asking how they need help and plan together how you can support them.

Question 11

What ideas have you got that your parent/carer can do to support you better with your mental health?

From this question we get to see advice from young people themselves of what you as their parent/carer can do to help. A couple of examples of what young people have suggested is:

‘Keep checking in on me and offer to spend quality time with me where we can talk.’

‘Not having impossible standards/ unrealistic goals and listening more to what their children want.’

‘Our parents should have meetings where they speak about mental health with their children and be able to understand and support them.’

‘Be more educated about it to notice signs rather than me having to go to them as it can be uncomfortable.’

‘Try to listen more rather than try to find solutions immediately- sometimes that makes the situation more stressful.’

‘Have more understanding. Whether it's asking me about it or finding websites/information leaflets on mental health awareness.’

‘Research more into issues so that they can better understand how mental health can affect individuals. Learn how to supportively discuss these issues and to provide positive solutions and sympathetic support.’

‘They should arrange fun activities like playing board games, sports or going for a walk together. They should get to know when their child is feeling down or insecure so that they can approach them instead of the young person always going to them’.

‘Take time out of their day to sit down and talk with you about anything and everything; make it seem like a calming environment when talking about it.’¹³

Signs that a young person might be struggling with their mental health

We have put this list together based on our own experiences with feeling anxious and low.

Physical:

- Frequently tired
- Weight gain or loss
- Difficulty sleeping
- Zoning out or disassociating
- Panic attacks

Behavioural:

- Stop looking after themselves (eg stop showering)
- Spending more time on their own
- Not putting as much effort in with their appearance
- Making more negative comments on the world around them
- Not caring about school work
- Making negative comments about their body
- Not enjoying activities that they used to
- Being short tempered
- Not wanting to go to school
- Putting less effort into school or activities
- Loss of friendships
- Being quieter than usual
- Being increasingly irritated

A note from one of our Prosper Parent Programme practitioners:

Many children and young people struggle at times to regulate their emotions, they can experience high levels of anxiety, distress and upset, which can become crippling and hard for parents and carers to understand and be helpful with.

It is important at these times to be able to reassure our children that what they are feeling is temporary and transient. We, as parents and carers need to have a clear understanding of the developmental issues that are strongly influencing our children at this time. We need to be able to help them understand what anxiety is and its purpose; to remember that it is not always illness behaviour, but part of our children's natural defence mechanism.

We need to retain the hopefulness of future change, because at this critical time our children are in danger of beginning to feel helpless and hopeless, because these strong emotions can be new, confusing and at times, overwhelming.

In The Relationships Centre's Prosper Parent Programme, we offer information on the role and function of emotional development and support parents/carers to understand the practical origins of our feelings of being overwhelmed.

We also explore how supporting our young people's development of 'Distress tolerance' and 'Emotional literacy' can offer long-term promise of our children's eventual escape from being dominated and defeated by these strong internal feelings and emotions.

Parents/carers need to retain their role as the 'emotional life support machines' for our children, and understand that as children grow towards independence and to adolescence, they often need this support even more, but in a different and newly developing way. We as parents, have to be able to renegotiate this new relationship and continue to offer our children the emotional support they need.

Our course offers small insights, some skills and some of the jigsaw pieces needed to support our children and teenagers.

Resources



Websites

<https://www.relationshipscentreleicestershire.org.uk/the-early-intervention-service/prosper-programme>

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/support-for-parents/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/supporting-others/childrens-mental-health/>



Books



Helping Your Child with Fears and Worries- Cathy Creswell

Trauma Proofing your Kids- Peter A Levine

The Definitive Guide to Raising Resilient Children: Empower Your Kids to Master Their Emotions, Solve Problems, Overcome Adversity and Build Unshakable Confidence- Lee Alexander

What Teens Need to Succeed- Peter Benson, Jusy Galbraith and Pamela Espeland



Social media accounts

@TheRelationships Centre

@youngmindsuk

@mind

@_place2be

Support services



Central Access Point Line (CAP)

111 option 2

For urgent mental health needs
24/7

SHOUT

www.giveusashout.org

Text SHOUT to 85258 24/7
A free and confidential 24/7 text
messaging support service



Harmless

www.harmless.org.uk

Centre for self-harm and
suicide prevention offering
support online and in centres
in Leicester
(self referral forms online)

tellmi

www.tellmi.help

Tellmi is a safe, anonymous app
where you can talk about
absolutely anything. From
anxiety to autism, dating to
depression, self-harm to self-
esteem.

Samaritans

116 123

jo@samaritans.org

A free, completely confidential
number available 24/7 to call
when you need to talk as well as
an
email service

Get in touch!

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