

HOW TO KNOW WHEN THINGS ARE NOT OKAY?



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WITH SUPPORT OF YOUNG
PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE
OF CEREBRAL PALSY

A guide for young people with cerebral
palsy to help recognise the signs of
mental health problems

WHAT ARE MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS?

Mental health is a term used to describe a healthy positive mental state where people feel like they can deal with problems in their life easily.

When a lot of negative things happen in our lives, we can sometimes have our mental health impacted. This is sometimes called having a **mental health problem**. Mental health problems occur when we feel like we are not able to deal with life's problems easily. This is a very normal experience and everyone will have a mental health problem at some point in their lives.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE A MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM?



There are seven areas where mental health problems may be more easily noticed. Let's explore these in the following pages.

1.SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Sometimes we may not feel as social as we used to. You may notice that you have lost interest in your usual daily activities, including going to work or a day program.

Or perhaps you have lost interest in things you liked before.

Maybe you have stopped talking to your support workers, or just don't feel up to talking to them.

Or maybe you find yourself not wanting to go to school or to see your friends.



2.FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS

Understanding how we feel can be really confusing at times. This can be even more true when we are struggling with a mental health problem. For example, you may cry over things that would not normally make you cry.

You may get really hot or cold before, during or after talking with someone.

It may also be that you feel more sad or nervous than normal.

Or you may find yourself becoming more angry and annoyed than usual.



3.HURTING OURSELVES

Sometimes when things aren't going as we would expect, we may have thoughts of wanting to hurt ourselves. This can be really scary for you and your family.

For example, you may have thoughts of wanting to bite or scratch yourself, or to use other things to hurt yourself.

Or you may have thoughts of throwing yourself from your wheelchair or bed. If you find yourself with these thoughts, that is okay. It is important that we try not to act on them. Talking to someone you feel comfortable with can help keep you safe.



4. THOUGHTS AND THINKING

When we are struggling with our mental health, it can impact the way we think. As a result, you might be more forgetful than normal.

Or you may find it more difficult to focus or concentrate on things.

You may notice your parents, carers, or friends having to repeat things to you.

Or you may feel foggy in your head.



5.ALCOHOL AND DRUGS


When things are getting difficult, it can sometimes feel easier to take action into our own hands. Sometimes we may find that we are increasing or decreasing our medication without a doctor telling us to do so.

Other times we may start trying alcohol or other drugs, or even increase the amount we are already using.



6.ACTIONS AND BEHAVIOUR

When we are having difficulties with our mental health, our behaviour can also change. You may notice you become more fidgety or restless, or perhaps you become more stiff in your muscles and body. Young people with cerebral palsy report these changes in behaviour when they're having troubles with their mental health.



You may even notice changes to your eating and/or communication.

7. PHYSICAL HEALTH

Mental health is also linked to our physical health. Often if we have a mental health problem, our bodies will try to let us know. For example, if you are finding things emotionally difficult, you may experience more pain or fatigue than is normal for you.

This may look like not wanting to get out of bed for a couple of days, or not wanting to move around a lot.

Your breathing may even become faster and heavier, or perhaps even slower.



WHAT CAN I DO IF I NOTICE THESE SIGNS?

If you notice the signs from the previous pages, it's important to reach out to a parent, carer, or somebody that you feel safe talking to. It may be a little bit difficult to talk about, but on the next page there are some ways you can try to start the chat.

Mum, I haven't been feeling myself lately. I think I may need to talk to someone.



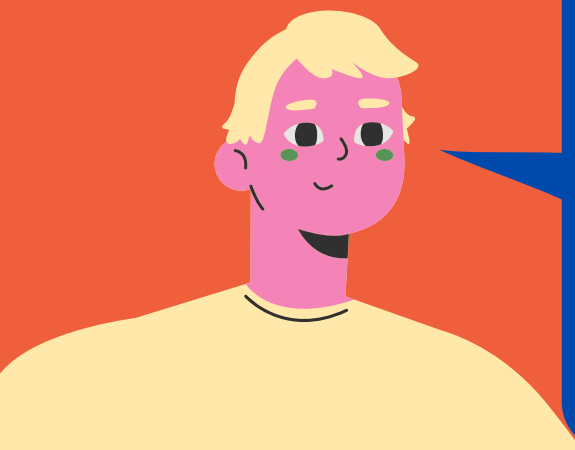
Dad, I've been feeling sad lately. I'm feeling okay now, but I don't like the feeling.



I've been really tired lately, more than usual. It's making me not want to get out of bed.



Dad, I'm really scared that I want to hurt myself. I've thought about it, but don't really want to.



WHAT CAN I DO IF I NOTICE THESE SIGNS?

There are also special
services that you can
contact to get some
support. These include:

[KidsHelpLine](#)

[Lifeline](#)

[BeyondBlue](#)

[Headspace](#)

[Suicide Callback](#)

WHAT CAN I DO IF I NOTICE THESE SIGNS?

You can also talk to your parents, carers, or person you trust about seeing a doctor to get a mental health care plan. A mental health care plan will allow you to gain access to see a psychologist who can help you with your mental health problem.

WHAT CAN I DO IF I NOTICE THESE SIGNS?

It can also be useful to interact with other young people with cerebral palsy. CP-Achieve offers opportunities for young people with CP to have their voices heard and to help provide novel insights into what is needed to support young people with CP.

**REMEMBER,
EVERYONE WILL
HAVE A MENTAL
HEALTH
PROBLEM AT
SOME POINT.
IT'S OKAY TO
REACH OUT
AND GET
SUPPORT.**

