



How to know when **SOMETHING'S NOT RIGHT**



batyr & The Happiness Institute
Parent/Carer guide

Who is this guide for?

This guide has been created for the batyr community; for all parents and carers who are looking to support young people with experiences of mental ill-health.

We understand that it can be tough for parents and carers who want to support their young person but may not have the tools or the confidence to do so.

This guide has been created by leading positive psychologist Dr. Tim Sharp AKA Dr. Happy from The Happiness Institute in collaboration with batyr.

How to know when something's not right

How do I know what's normal and what may require more support? This is a really common question, and a really important one to discuss. Most parents/carers know that some level of distress is normal, we all get upset from time to time, it's part of the human experience. On top of this, adolescence is a time full of change and often turmoil, meaning some teenagers can become upset even more and even more often. Most parents also understand the importance of not overreacting or jumping in too soon when things might just sort themselves out on their own.





It's **IMPORTANT** to **UNDERSTAND**
and **ACKNOWLEDGE** that
so-called 'negative emotions',
like **DEPRESSION**, **ANXIETY** and
STRESS, like anger and frustration
and irritability, are all **NORMAL**
PARTS OF BEING HUMAN.

These are especially normal during
adolescent years when most kids or young
adults undergo massive changes physically,
but also emotionally and socially.

These are the years our bodies change, and we develop bumps and curves and hair where previously, these didn't exist. These are the years our friendships and social groups become of primary importance; some would argue they're the most important priority at this time in life.

At the same time, our brains are changing and we're trying to work out who we are and how we fit into the world and so much more. When you take all of this into consideration, why wouldn't this be a confusing and to some extent, distressing time! Therefore, it's important NOT to over-pathologise these emotions, it's important not to unnecessarily view an emotion your child/young person may be experiencing as indication of some disease or disorder. In fact, quite the opposite, it's important to normalise these emotions and to help our children recognise, label and process them as they'll no doubt need to do throughout other stages in their lives.

Experiencing distress should not necessarily be seen as a bad thing, more often than not, it's an understandable reaction to negative life events and should be understood as such. However, there's a point when 'normal' experiences of low or unpleasant moods, like depression or anxiety, become unhealthy and may need further attention. If your child/young person is more than just sad or anxious, there are several psychological disorders more technically referred to as 'Major Depressive Disorder', 'Generalised Anxiety Disorder', 'Panic Disorder', 'Specific Phobia' and more (such as Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder). There are also a range of eating and body image disorders (especially prevalent, unfortunately, in adolescents) as well as other possibilities (such as psychosis or bipolar disorder).

This is not the time or place to comprehensively list or describe all the signs and symptoms of all these possible forms of mental ill-health, nor is it even necessary. What's most important is to understand the fundamentals of when the normal becomes abnormal, and then you'll be able to tell if the situation needs further attention.

HERE ARE SOME OF THE MOST OBVIOUS WARNINGS SIGNS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN BEHAVIOUR OR PERSONALITY.

This means that if you notice anything out of the ordinary for your child/young person, you should address it. For example, if your normally clean child stops washing or if your normally diligent child stops doing homework or household chores. If your child's behaviour or mood or way of interacting changes in any significant way, especially if suddenly, then this might deserve further attention

PERSISTENT LOW MOOD/DISTRESSING EMOTIONS.

If your child/young person seems to be experiencing unpleasant moods such as being depressed/anxious or they are withdrawing socially and avoiding activities they used to take part in for more than a few weeks this may be cause for concern. We all have a few bad days here and there, but if those few bad days turn into bad weeks, without relief, then they need to be addressed.

UNABLE TO FUNCTION DAILY.

If the distress being experienced impacts on daily functioning and either stops or limits your child's ability to attend school/work or participate in social and recreational activities then this should be considered a serious warning sign. When you are considering the warning signs above, think about whether the behaviours could be explained by medication/medical condition or the use of alcohol/drugs. If they could be, then address these issues rather than pointing to mental ill-health straight away or make sure they are taken into consideration.

What to do if you feel like your child/young person needs some support

If your child/young person is distressed and/or dysfunctional, and if their distress and/or dysfunction meets the criteria above, then action should be taken as soon as is practically possible. Consider the following options, you may need to try several:

Talk to your child/young person.

Express your concern and focus on the specific observations you've made and why they're of concern to you. Listen to their response and do all you can to learn as much as you can about what's going on for them.

Check in with their school.

Ideally, explain to your child/young person what you're doing and why you're doing it. If you're concerned then it's appropriate to talk to their teacher/school counsellor or whomever the best contact is to try and figure out whether any worrying behaviours have been noticed in the school context and gain a full picture of the situation.

Make an appointment with your local GP

who will be able to create a mental health treatment plan and provide a referral to the most appropriate mental health clinician. Currently Medicare allows you to claim up to 20 sessions with a mental health professional each calendar year.

Make an appointment with (and/or get a referral to) a local Clinical Psychologist

or an appropriately trained mental health professional (ideally, one with expertise and experience in working with young people)

ONLINE RESOURCES:



PARENTS.AU.REACHOUT.COM

ReachOut offers parents trusted information that makes it easier for them to support their teenagers. Everything they create is based on the latest evidence and is designed with experts, and young people or their parents. ReachOut is a free online service that's available anytime and pretty much anywhere.



HEALTHYFAMILIES.BEYONDBLUE.ORG.AU

Healthy Families is all about giving you the information, knowledge and confidence to support the young people in your life – whether you're a parent, guardian, grandparent, a favourite uncle or an awesome auntie. They're also there to help you take care of your own mental health and wellbeing, especially if you're a new parent or about to become one.



RUOK.ORG.AU/HOW-TO-ASK

R U OK? Provide resources to empower people to have meaningful conversations about life. They give great guidance around how to start conversations and how to navigate the chat as it progresses.

ALWAYS SEEK HELP IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS FOR A YOUNG PERSON'S SAFETY.

We've already discussed that negative emotions are common and a normal part of life. Just as we all experience pain if we fall or have some sort of accident, we also experience 'psychological or emotional pain' during difficult times. In the same way some of these 'injuries' can be treated at home, with a band aid or paracetamol, most forms of distress can be 'treated' with love and compassion with listening and support.

However, if you believe your child's symptoms have crossed that line from 'normal' to 'abnormal' then please seek help. Not everyone will need professional treatment but those that do can be treated effectively. Most people, including most adolescents, with the most common forms of mental ill-health can be helped relatively quickly and effectively. If you need immediate support please see a list of crisis support services below.



Crisis support

If life is in danger please call 000.

Lifeline

Lifeline is a national charity providing all Australians experiencing a personal crisis with access to 24 hour crisis support and suicide prevention services.

Call - 13 11 14 (24/7)

Text - 0477 13 11 14 (12pm - midnight AEST)

Chat Online - www.lifeline.org.au/crisis-chat (7pm to midnight AEST)

Kids Helpline

Kids Helpline is Australia's only free, private and confidential, phone counselling service specifically for young people aged between 5 and 25.

Call - 1800 55 1800 (24/7)

Chat Online - kidshelpline.com.au/get-help/webchat-counselling (24/7)

Suicide Callback Service

Suicide Callback Service is a nationwide service providing 24/7 telephone and online counselling to people affected by suicide.

Call - 1300 659 467

Online Counselling - www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au



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