

GOOD MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

FOR SCOUTS

[kentscouts.goodmental
healthmatters.com](https://kentscouts.goodmentalhealthmatters.com)

The Guide

Produced by clinical commissioning
groups in Kent and Medway

**DO YOU
EVER FEEL...**

**OVERWHELMED
ANXIOUS
UNDER PRESSURE
DEPRESSED
VULNERABLE
FEARFUL FOR THE FUTURE
YOU CAN'T SLEEP?
SCARED OF YOUR OWN EMOTIONS**



YOU'RE NOT ALONE

Most of us struggle like this at some time in life. The good news is there's now lots more conversation about **mental wellbeing**. We now understand that it's just as important to look after our *mind* as our body.

Washing, eating, brushing teeth, exercising and sleeping regularly are things we build into our daily routines to keep our body functioning well.

But what about our minds, our mental health?

How can we get into good mental health habits, so that when tough times come along, we are 'brain fit' and ready?

What's on your mind?
Update your status!
Join the conversation ...

WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

Mental health is our emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. It determines how we think, feel, behave and interact with others.

Let's not get mistaken. Some people suffer with serious mental health disorders that require proper medical attention. That's not what we're talking about here. When we talk GMHM we're talking to YOU – about how *you* can take **small steps** to protect your mind health and build emotional resilience to see you through challenging times.

STOP MESSING WITH MY HEAD!



 KENT SCOUTS

What causes mental health challenges?

Usually, a combination of stress and pressure build up over time to a point where we begin to struggle.

For example, on-going worry about school, homework and exams, troublesome friendship dynamics, anxiety over sexual identity or social stress and bullying, fear of not knowing about your future . . . any of this ringing true?

Many people also live with difficult family situations or face big and unexpected changes – a family or school move, divorce, illness, injury, merging family or loss of someone close.

Whether it's one big shock to the system or many little sustained pressures, all these things can lead to sleep disturbance, feelings of helplessness, anxiety, isolation, anger and loneliness.

Anyone can face challenges to their mental health.

Why are young adults so vulnerable?

During the teenage years the brain goes through a huge amount of rewiring.

Most takes place in the area of the brain associated with planning, problem solving, prioritising, thinking ahead and emotion. Experts say brain development is not complete until about the age of 25. No wonder we can feel a bit fuzzy at times!

All this can make it tough to cope with the highs and lows of everyday, especially when your mates are dealing with their own stuff and everyone is super self-conscious. As if all the bodily changes aren't enough!

We can't blame our developing brain for 'bad behaviour', but it helps to know why sometimes the way we feel and react can be a little 'off'!

Watch out for unexpected emotional changes – it's just your brain rewiring!

kentscouts.goodmentalhealthmatters.com

GET YOUR HEAD RIGHT NOW!

So how can we develop good mental health and help others who we fear may be struggling?

- As a Scout you already have a head start – challenge, adventure, fun and teamwork are great for mental wellbeing; along with an instant bunch of mates who share similar goals and regularly meet to explore the real world rather than just a virtual one.

As well as that, GMHM has joined the Scouts Association to put together 5 simple action points that best build brain health.

GET YOUR HEAD AROUND THIS:

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT 50 YEAR OLDS WHO WERE SCOUTS AND GUIDES HAVE BETTER MENTAL HEALTH THAN OTHERS WHO WERE NOT PART OF THE MOVEMENT.



1 EATING MATTERS



Food for mood? Eat yourself happy? Yes, really!

We all know that what we put into our body has a direct effect on our physical health, but did you know that there is a proven link between what we eat and how we *feel*?

1 glass of fizzy drink contains twice the recommended daily sugar allowance.

Science tells us that nutrients in food can help the production of our body's 'feel-good' chemicals: serotonin and dopamine. These chemicals are the things that regulate our mood and sleep and manage motivation, attention and emotion. When these guys are not at their best we feel low, fatigued and just not as excited about life as we could be.

When we're feeling a little down, our natural instinct is to hit the donuts, chocolate or other sugary snack. There's some science behind this. Our bodies crave a sugar hit. But that 'good feeling' doesn't last for long. In fact, this kind of sugar high dips quickly, causing us to crash and start craving the biscuits again.

Combat this by cutting back on those sugary snacks. Instead, eat well-balanced meals at regular and sensible times of the day so that your blood sugar release is steady. Food is essentially fuel so if you dig into a bowl of sugary cereal or have a fizzy drink just before bedtime you're giving your body a massive 'wake-up!' call and then asking it to try to sleep – that's just crunchy nuts!

There's lots of information around on how to eat healthily for body and mind but, as a general guideline, keep your sugar consumption in check and instead fuel your body with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables and complex carbohydrates. Think of eggs and oily fish as your brain's best friend and don't fall into the 'energy drink' trap. They might claim to provide you with vitamins, but their main ingredient is caffeine, which will leave you in a spin. Instead, keep your body and brain really well hydrated with lots of water.

They say we are what we eat, so stop being a donut and get on board with some small steps to healthy eating. Your body and your brain will thank you for it.

2

SLEEP MATTERS



“One more check of messages.”

“Just ten more minutes of Netflix.” “One more browse through Instagram.” “Just to the end of this game on the Playstation.” Familiar?

Why is it that we seem to want to do anything but go to bed, especially when we hear that the teenage brain needs a minimum of 9 hours' sleep a night? Yes, that's right! Sleep is important for everyone, but experts tell us that sleep is even more vital for the fast-developing and rapidly re-wiring teenage brain.

If we don't get enough sleep at night it we soon find ourselves over-tired during the day. We might manage for a while, but quite quickly we start struggling to concentrate, lose our temper or get easily upset. Over time lack of sleep can cause serious problems – anxiety and body-clock issues can move onto more serious states of depression and longer-term mental illness.

So if you want to protect your brain and take your mental health seriously, get to grips with sleep matters.

- Establish a bedtime routine that allows you to sleep for at least 9 hours – and stick to it.
- Try not to eat close to bedtime and avoid sugary and caffeinated drinks.
- Give your mind a break from screen activity. Electronic gadgets just stimulate the brain and leave you struggling to sleep. Instead, relax by reading a book.
- Make the place where you sleep a dark, calm and relaxing space – and keep your phone or other electronic devices out of the bedroom.

Night-time screen-time triples the chances of mental illness.



3

REALITY MATTERS



Are you a connectivity addict?

You probably don't think of yourself as 'addicted', but you might be surprised how much time you spend 'just checking in' or browsing online. How do you feel if you haven't been able to connect for a few hours? How do you feel if you don't reply to a friend's message straight away or if your messages and posts don't get an immediate response? These things probably affect the way you think and behave, more than you even realise.

No doubt about it, social media is great and YouTube and the online world opens up the universe for us, but we need to be aware that digital dangers lurk in the 'safety' of our own room – trolls and social bullies can have devastating effect on our dignity and self-esteem and the pressure to pick up 'likes' and 'followers' can leave people vulnerable in the real world. There's a direct link between social media use and poor mental health, particularly in young people, it's vital that we build some social media hygiene into our lives.

Top tips for smart scouts:

- Limit the time you spend online.
- Recognise that not everything in the digital world is necessarily true.
- Only become online friends with your actual friends.
- Think carefully about what you post and what affect it might have on you or someone else. Once something's out there, it's very hard to take down.
- If you experience any kind of bullying online, tell someone you trust straight away. Don't respond or retaliate, just block the person immediately.
- Look out for your friends. If they've been upset by something they've seen online talk to them. Take care of them in the real world and never ignore a problem.

If you spend more than 3 hours each school day on social media you are twice as likely to suffer poor mental health.

4

EXERCISE MATTERS



Scouts have always known the benefits of being active.

- ◆ There's nothing like getting out as a team to do something that gets the adrenaline rushing, the heart racing and the blood pumping!

When we're active our body releases chemicals called endorphins. It's these guys that react with the brain and make us feel great. Even a short time without an endorphin kick can leave us feeling tired and sluggish and then it becomes harder to get out there and do anything. It can be a downward spiral to depression, anxiety and low self-esteem.

Find an activity that you love, so you'll stick at it. Team sports are great, especially when you have a whole gang of mates to motivate you and share the wins. Exercise can be built into all your life – a good dance round the kitchen, cycling to the shop or just walking the dog. Whatever you choose to do, try to get around 60 minutes a day of activity that raises the heart rate. That way you can be sure you're helping yourself stay body-fit and brain-happy.



5

POSITIVITY MATTERS



The way we feel about ourselves has a massive impact on our mental wellbeing.

Our friends are a huge influence on us and it can be easy to get into a spiral of negative talk. Social media and television can often make us feel less than we are – not good-looking enough, not fun enough, not cool enough; or missing out on good things that others are part of.

It's important to protect ourselves from this kind of influence and there are some simple steps we can take to help us keep a positive state of mind:

- Think about how friends make you feel and never give in to peer pressure. Find some new friends if necessary.
- Be aware when you're being negative about yourself and give yourself a break. If you look in the mirror, make yourself say something positive about what you see.
- Find ways to relax and make time for the things you enjoy (other than Youtube, gaming and social media!).
- Try writing down positive things about yourself. It's great to keep a 'positive journal' of things you are grateful for.
- Always talk about the way you're feeling with your family and trusted friends. People really care and, when you feel low or anxious, it always helps to talk things through.



HEADS UP FOR PARENTS

Households with young people can often experience extra stresses and dramas. The beginning of adolescence can be a rollercoaster ride that puts new strains on even the most 'together' of families.

Things that seem trivial to adults can detonate emotional grenades from sensitive, self-conscious teens. Friendship dynamics can be explosive and the discovery of being left out of a group chat can be catastrophic! This is because young minds are still developing the emotional arsenal to deal with everyday interactions and challenges. While all this is happening parents often find their loving, communicative child has turned into a moody teenager who just wants to spend time alone in his or her room.



How can I tell the difference between 'normal teenage behaviour' and something more serious?

Mood swings and isolating behaviours are usually perfectly normal. In fact, they are important developmental phases. Young people need to develop independence and discover self-identity and parents need to be respectful of an increasing need for privacy.

Remember that teenagers are going through massive changes in both brain and body.

Though your teenager is reluctant to spend 'quality time' with the family, you should find that they are still **able to engage in healthy social activity outside the home**. Their Scout meeting is a great opportunity to mix with others and engage in all manner of activity that is positive for mental wellbeing. If you find that they start to withdraw socially, disconnect from old friends and seem uninterested in making new ones, this could be a warning sign that you should keep a more careful eye on their emotional health.

It's perfectly normal for teenagers to experience episodes of anxiety, frustration and feelings of being overwhelmed. But these shouldn't last more than a few days. Other warning signs might be persistent physical symptoms, reluctance to go to school, noticeable changes in energy levels or concentration or episodes of aggressive behaviour.

What can I do to help?

Early intervention is crucial to prevent normal stress and anxiety developing into more harmful mental health situations. This leaflet features **5 action points** that can help you and your teenager establish good practices to protect the mental health of the whole family. If you believe your child is showing signs of sustained anxiety or depression, seek clinical guidance by visiting your GP who will help to find the right support.

Listen. Don't interrupt, judge or instantly try to provide all the answers. Teenagers are growing up in a very different world to the one you grew up in and you won't necessarily have all the answers anyway!

Above all, **be there**. Though your teenager may appear reluctant to spend time in your company, it's important that they know you are there for them.

Parenting isn't easy and the notion that children need parents less as they grow older is questionable. With so many physical changes and social and educational challenges **they need your support** to help them navigate their way into balanced and positive adulthood. Your relationship at this stage in life can have a massive impact on their future.

GMHM, in collaboration with the NHS and the Scouts Association, believe that these 5 simple steps can make a positive impact on the whole family. If you have any concerns, talk to your pack leader about your child and don't hesitate to seek proper professional advice if you are worried. There is help available. Visit the website to find out more and get excited about the small changes you can make. Because Good Mental Health really does Matter.

If face-to-face contact is uncomfortable, try talking on a car journey where there will be less eye contact.



**GOOD
MENTAL
HEALTH
MATTERS**

kentscouts
goodmentalhealthmatters
.com

NHS