Advocating for children with disability

Help for Your Family fact sheet

Finding mental health support for your child



Dealing with mental health issues and disability can be challenging for both you and your child.

Sometimes, symptoms of anxiety and depression are overlooked in children with disability. It's important to trust your instincts and seek assistance if your child experiences unexplained mood or behavioural changes.

There are a variety of services to help improve your child's mental health.

General Practitioner (GP)

Your child's GP is the best place to start. They can check if there is something physical affecting your child. Pain or illness can cause behaviour changes. The GP can monitor their condition and prescribe appropriate medication. They can also write a mental health treatment plan, which helps cover the cost of a counsellor or psychologist.
If necessary, your GP can refer your child to a psychiatrist.

Community health

Community health services across Victoria offer mental health support, including counselling and psychology. These are usually free or at a reduced cost.

Find out what community health services are offered near you.

Community Health Directory
https://www.health.vic.gov.au/community-health/community-health-directory

School mental health practitioners

Mental health practitioners are in every secondary and specialist school. They might be a psychologist, mental health nurse, social worker, or occupational therapist. They can talk to you or your child about what support is available locally.

headspace

headspace is a free service for young people aged between 12 and 25. Their centres have doctors, health workers and mental health professionals. They can help with different issues, including anxiety, stress, bullying, depression, or problems with family and friends.

There are centres across regional Victoria and metropolitan Melbourne.

You can chat online with a qualified professional, visit a centre, or just read their information on mental health topics.

Go to headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation
https://headspace.org.au/

Seeing a psychologist or counsellor

Seeing a psychologist or counsellor can help young people talk about how they are feeling and put in place strategies to support well-being.

It's important to make sure the counsellor or psychologist can support the communication needs of your child with autism, intellectual disability, or communication disorder. Check that the professional your child will be seeing has experience and knowledge of your child's disability. Seek referrals from friends, colleagues, doctors, teachers, or your paediatrician, and ask why they are recommended.

Like other therapies, counselling or psychology can't work in isolation. Families should be actively involved in supporting strategies or plans at home and making sure that other important people in your child's life are involved.

Finding a psychologist or counsellor that suits the needs of you and your family may take time and there may be waiting lists.

Counsellors should have professional registration. You can check or search for counsellors via ARCAP Register, Australian Register of Counsellors and Psychotherapists.

You can search for psychologists in your area on websites such as Australian Psychological Society.

Find a Psychologist
https://psychology.org.au/find-a-psychologist

Australian Register of Counsellors and Psychotherapists
https://www.arcapregister.com.au/

Covering the cost of a psychologist or counsellor

Talk to your GP about a Mental Health Treatment Plan, this provides Medicare rebates for up to 10 individual psychological appointments and up to 10 group allied mental health services each year. A rebate means that there is some cost covered by Medicare, and some cost you will need to pay.

You can't get Medicare rebates for all the sessions at once. After your first six appointments, you must see your doctor again for a Mental Health Plan Review. They will consider whether you need a referral for further sessions.

https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/mental-health-treatment-plan

If you have private health insurance, you may be able to access some mental health services through your insurer. However, it is important to remember that not all mental health services are covered by private health insurance.

What does mental health support look like?

Talking therapy

Talking therapy or counselling is where your child can talk about their situation with a trained counsellor (usually one-to-one.) Counsellors don't often give advice; they support the child to talk through the situation and come up with their own solutions.

Mental health therapies for pre-teens and teens
https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens/mental-health-physical-health/mental-health-therapies-services/mental-health-therapies-for-teens

Medication

In some cases, your child's GP or psychiatrist may suggest medication to assist with conditions like anxiety or depression (psychologists cannot prescribe medication). Medication can help relieve symptoms, but it's important to be aware of possible side effects. Have a discussion with your child's doctor or psychiatrist about any concerns or queries you may have regarding the medication.

Managing mental health medications
https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/servicesandsupport/managing-mental-health-medications

Safety plan

For some young people, it will be important to set up a safety plan. This plan should be created with input from your child. It's there to help your child when they are in crisis and perhaps at risk of suicidal behaviour. It can include a written list of coping strategies, resources, and emergency contact numbers.

BeyondNow suicide safety plan
https://www.lifeline.org.au/get-help/support-toolkit/safety-planning/beyond-now

Serious mental health issues

Child and Youth Mental Health Services (CYMHS) supports children and young people with serious mental health issues:

Eastern Melbourne
Eastern Health: Infant, Child, Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Service
https://www.easternhealth.org.au/mental-health-3/infants-children-and-youth-0-25/

Inner South Melbourne
Alfred Health: Child and Youth Mental Health Service
https://www.alfredhealth.org.au/services/child-youth-mental-health-service

Northeast Melbourne
Austin Health: Child & youth mental health
https://www.austin.org.au/mental-health/child-and-youth/

Northwest Melbourne
The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne: Mental Health (0 to 18 years)
https://www.rch.org.au/mental-health/contact_us/

Parkville Youth and Mental Health and Wellbeing Service (12 to 25 years)
https://pymhws.org.au/

Southeast Melbourne
Monash Children's Hospital: Early in Life Mental Health Service
https://monashchildrenshospital.org/mental-health/

Monash Health: Child and adolescent services
https://monashhealth.org/services/mental-health/child-and-adolescent-services/

Barwon
Barwon Health: Infant and Child Mental Health and Wellbeing Service (0 to 11 years)
https://mhdas.barwonhealth.org.au/service/infant-child-mental-health-wellbeing/

Barwon Health: Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing services (12 to 25 years)
https://mhdas.barwonhealth.org.au/service/youth-mental-health-wellbeing/

Gippsland
LRH: Infants, children & young people (0 to 25 years)
https://lrh.com.au/mental-health-services/infants-children-young-people-0-25-years/

Glenelg
SouthWest Healthcare: Child and Adolescent Mental Health and Wellbeing
https://southwesthealthcare.com.au/service/child-and-adolescent-mental-health/

Goulburn Valley
GV Health: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
https://www.gvhealth.org.au/our-services/mental-health-services/camhs/

Grampians
Grampians Health Ballarat: Infant Child Mental Health Services (0 to 14 years)
https://www.gh.org.au/services/infant-child-mental-health/

Grampians Health: Mental Health and Wellbeing (15 to 26 years)
https://www.gh.org.au/care-categories/mental-health-and-wellbeing/youth-young-adults-15-26-years/

Loddon Campaspe / Southern Mallee
Bendigo Health: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)
https://www.bendigohealth.org.au/ChildandAdolescentMentalHealthService/

North Eastern Hume
Albury Wodonga Health: Mental Health
https://www.awh.org.au/services-departments/mental-health

North Mallee
Mildura Base Public Hospital: Mental Health
https://www.mbph.org.au/mental-health

If you are worried your child is suicidal

Caring for someone at risk of suicide is a traumatic experience for everyone, but you are not alone so please seek support.

If you are concerned your child is in immediate danger of suicide, take them to hospital or call 000.

Online or telephone support

Kids Helpline
Free confidential 24-hour telephone and online counselling for young people aged between 5 and 18.

Call 1800 55 1800

Kids Helpline
https://www.kidshelp.com.au/

Beyondblue
24-hour telephone support and links to local services.

Call 1300 22 4636

Beyond Blue
https://www.beyondblue.org.au

Lifeline
24-hour national telephone crisis counselling service and online counselling.

Call 13 11 14

Lifeline
https://www.lifeline.org.au

MOST
A free digital mental health platform for young people
https://www.most.org.au/

The Suicide Response Project – Autism
A resource for autistic people and their families about suicide and how to help. It highlights the risk factors and includes information about what to say and do if you feel your child is at risk of suicide.

Read more about The Suicide Response Project
https://www.suicideresponseproject.com/

Useful links

Depression and low mood: autistic teenagers
https://raisingchildren.net.au/autism/health-wellbeing/mental-health/depression-teens-with-asd

Children with disability: mental health and physical health
https://raisingchildren.net.au/disability/health-development

Useful links

Mental health treatment plans
https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/mental-health-treatment-plans

Mental health care and Medicare
https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/mental-health-care-and-medicare?context=60092

How much does it cost to see a psychologist?
https://psychology.org.au/psychology/about-psychology/what-it-costs

CID Easy English mental health resources
https://cid.org.au/resource/mental-health-guide/

Yellow Ladybugs mental health resource
https://www.yellowladybugs.com.au/Resources/View?resourceId=107

Emerging Minds disability resources
https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/library/?subject[]=disability

Emerging Minds Learning: Understanding autistic and ADHDer children's mental health
https://learning.emergingminds.com.au/course/understanding-autistic-and-adhder-childrens-mental-health

Free services for families

- **Support Line**
- **Workshops**
- **Information**
- **Peer support**