

PACK FOR

PARENTS AND CARERS



INTRO

If you are the parent/carer of a young person struggling with their mental health you may feel isolated, out of your depth, you may be asking “Why us? Why not someone else?”

You may be asking yourself again and again if it was something you did, if in fact you are to blame for this. You will probably feel that you're ill-equipped to handle this fragile, hurting young person, yet you desperately want to see them happy and able to face the world. You feel that you are stumbling in the dark and making so many mistakes. This is not just about your child, it's also about the whole family.

You may also feel that you need to protect your young person's privacy – and indeed they may have asked that you do so. This means however that you are set on a solitary path.

But you are not alone, there is help. We have produced this booklet to give you some guidance and tips as you take this journey with your young person. We hope that this helps. We hope that one day you can look at this young person and be struck with awe and pride at how strong they are now.



WHAT IS OTR AND WHAT DO WE BELIEVE?



...isn't just a charity providing mental health services, it's a mental health movement mobilised to support, promote and defend the mental health, rights and social position of young people.

We believe that our offer should be inclusive of all cultures and identities.

OTR's work not only recognises but actively celebrates diversity.

We believe that young people have unique strengths, interests and circumstances. OTR will continue to develop creative and diverse services to give young people choice.

We believe that the world around us impacts our wellbeing. We all have mental health. OTR places our wellbeing in a social, political and environmental context.

We believe in placing young people at the heart of our work. OTR's work is guided by young people's voices; empowering and mobilising young people to make change, both individually and collectively.

We believe in innovating and evolving to improve our offer for young people. Throughout our long history we have adapted to an ever-changing world and we will continue to do so to ensure our work remains relevant for young people.

We believe that relationships are what make the difference. OTR's approach centres around relationships between individuals, peers and communities.

We believe in the power of partnerships. OTR emphasises peer relationships and organisational collaboration to improve young people's mental health.

WHO, WHY AND HOW?



This leaflet was produced by a small co-production group consisting of OTR professionals and parents/carers. Through talking to parents/carers in the OTR parent/carer group and parents/carers we meet at Hubs (drop-in sessions) and counselling sessions, and also our own experience, we realised that there is very little information and support for parents of young people struggling with their mental health. We devised a questionnaire and sent this out to parents/carers and professionals asking them what type of information, advice and support they felt parents would like. After studying responses to these questionnaires we have created this resource.

If you would like any other information, or feel that anything should be added, please contact us at hello@otrbristol.org.uk

PARENT/CARER STORIES



My son has always had issues around school, he has never felt secure in a school environment; sudden changes to that environment and to the expectations placed upon him led to debilitating feelings of anxiety that were made manifest in his refusal to go to school. Usually this was very short term, one or two days, after which he would return. However in September last year my child refused to begin year nine at his secondary school, this time it was not just a few days but stretched on for many months. This created a feedback loop for him in that as the length of the absence increased so did the size of the task of returning; his anxiety grew exponentially, suddenly he was looking up at a mountain that he could not climb.

When you see your child struggle in this way it becomes very painful and distressing, I needed to get help, I needed reassurance that there was a pathway out of this situation. It is easy to feel helpless and a failure as a parent but reaching out for help taught me that I was not alone and there are people with whom I could share my experience, people who help and support can make a real difference.

OTR was an invaluable resource for my son and myself offering practical support in the form of CBT and a parental support group. This was provided in a fully supportive environment where we were heard and not judged.

The level of trust we experienced through our contact with Off the Record has helped us to move forward and begin to feel positive in what has otherwise been a very dark and stressful time. Suddenly I understood that young people can be vulnerable and confused and that this is normal, I also understood that there was a dynamic here where I was being triggered by this situation, feeling inadequate, hopeless and fearful, understanding this was the first step in enabling me to work through these feelings and gain a new perspective allowing me to move forward which in turn gave me the strength to support my son.



PARENT/CARER STORIES



It has been amazing. Firstly by removing the stigma of mental health issues amongst teenagers. Sadly resources are lacking for the children. As a parent you feel judged and question could i have been a better parent, GP instantly focus on family life, I almost felt I had let my child down. How could i not have noticed my child was struggling when she covers it well. Meeting other parents I now realise it is sadly widespread. I have felt the group has been really supportive, non judgemental and informative. It has enabled me to open up to friends and find there are more people struggling than you would think. I would like to expand on this and am doing a CBT course to support people based on this. My only problem is that I cannot get to the meeting on time due to work commitments, however nobody makes you feel bad for arriving late, I think it is fantastic and cannot praise OTR enough. A year ago we were desperately struggling for guidance. I hope it can continue. Thank you.



HOW DO I HELP MY CHILD?

Before the session:

- Make sure your young person wants to go to counselling or other activity - don't force them, allow them to decide for themselves.
- If your young person is anxious about their first appointment, ask them openly: what is going on for them? How can you support them?
- If your young person is anxious about their counselling sessions please remember that parents and carers have the option to come into those sessions as well - you can offer it to your young person as an option.
- Suggest the Hubs as a good place to meet OTR staff and a way to learn more about services and our offices - sometimes walking through the door can be the hardest step.
- It's also important to remember that if parents and carers are anxious their young people might feel anxious too - explore if this is your or their anxiety. Come to our parent drop-ins to manage your feelings and get more support on this.
- Some parents like to educate themselves more on mental health and sometimes come to our paid courses - that's an option as well.
- If you need more free advice or information about the first session or any other service, do come into our Hubs. Being informed makes you more confident too.

HOW DO I HELP MY CHILD?

After the session:

- Give your young person time and space to process their experience of support - go for a walk with them, take them out for a coffee.
- It is perfectly OK for a young person not to talk about their session. It's important to respect their need for time, space and silence to process it.
- It's also OK for you to ask about the session but try to do it tentatively: "How was the session for you? Do you want to talk about it? Just so you know you can talk about it a bit later if that's better."
- If your young person did not enjoy their first counselling session there are few options: let them know that they can stop, they can request a different counsellor but it's also worth being aware of the fact that the first few sessions might be difficult and it's worth continuing with the process. It's OK and perfectly normal to feel this way.

WHAT TO EXPECT IF YOUR CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON IS ACCESSING 1:1 COUNSELLING SUPPORT

Dependent on which kind of 1:1 service your child or young person chooses, and how they access OTR, they will be offered between 6 and 8 sessions (Pro Real, our computer-based support offer, for instance often offers up to 8 sessions). During the first session, your child or young person will be informed about our attendance policy and given more general information such as how long each session will be, what happens if the practitioner is sick or on holiday, how to get in the building etc. Practitioners will share that the sessions are confidential and that the child or young person can choose who they want us to share information with (such as a trusted adult) and what information we share, if we ever need too. The sessions are also client led with means it is their choice as to what information they share with the practitioner and what they want to work on as a goal for therapy.

At the end of the sessions, the young person will be informed about other services at OTR they can access and how to do this; similarly we might point to other organisations who can help. Your child or young person may also be informed about a specific service that may best meet their needs and therefore a direct referral may be discussed.

We believe the way we work, embodies OTR ethical values as well as our own professional ethical principles, values and good practice standards.

For more information about what counselling is, please view [this link](#).

WHAT TO EXPECT IF YOUR CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON IS ACCESSING GROUP SUPPORT

It is important that your child or young person has opted in to the group themselves however they do not have to speak if they don't want to. They can go through all 6 without saying a word but will still pick up some great resources. If you or your child or young person wish to know more or feel worried, you can request to read the feedback from previous users.

WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE DROP-INS

OTR has two types of drop-in services:

The Hubs are places where you and your child or young person can find out more about OTR and the various services on offer. You can expect a friendly and welcoming atmosphere in an informal setting. Here your child or young person can be registered and signed up to a service that they chose if they wish. You can also find out about the Parent Group at OTR.

Other drop-ins are places where your child or young person can attend to do an activity. These drop-ins do not have waiting lists and you don't have to sign up. They are places where a child or young person can be with others in a safe and relaxed environment and they can bring a friend! There is always somebody around to talk to if they are experiencing something difficult but they don't have to.



WHAT HAPPENS IF WE ARE WORRIED ABOUT YOUR CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON

If the practitioner is really worried about your child or young person, they will be supported to complete a Safety Plan which aims to highlight how they can keep themselves safe. This may include talking to other people such as a family member, teacher or friend or outside organisations such as Samaritans or the like. The practitioner will share that they need to talk to their safeguarding lead and from this discussion, a plan will be agreed upon about next steps and this may include a conversation with the child or young persons trusted adult, a conversation with the GP or another service that might best suit their needs.

Useful information about Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) -

If your child or young person has been referred to CAMHS, this is a useful guide on what it is.

www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/your-guide-to-support/guide-to-camhs/



SUPPORT FOR PARENTS/CARERS

1

General support:

A&E, Crisis Team, GPs, school staff, libraries, local authorities and MPs, community centres, children centres

2

General mental health support:

OTR Hubs www.otrbristol.org.uk/what-we-do/hubs/

Bristol Wellbeing Services www.iapt-bristol.awp.nhs.uk/

Bristol Mindline www.bristolmind.org.uk/help-and-counselling/mindline/

Bristol Mind Advocacy www.bristolmind.org.uk/help-and-counselling/outreach-advocacy/

Bristol Samaritans www.samaritans.org/branches/bristol/

3

Specific, tailored support

please check www.otrbristol.org.uk/other-support/

SELF CARE TIPS

1. MAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF - it is a challenge but in the grand scheme of things it is you who matters, so maybe it's worth skipping few daily tasks and sitting down for 15 minutes over a cuppa and simply doing nothing? Build it into your daily routine to allow yourself a little bit of me-time.

2. ALLOCATE A PERSONAL RETREAT SPACE - sometimes it is really difficult to find time and space to think, so choose a room, armchair, bench in the part as your "safe space". Go to that space when you need to rest, relax or simply think something over. Get into the habit of doing that and inform your family about it too, so you are not disturbed.

3. DO SOMETHING NICE FOR YOURSELF - buy yourself a small treat, listen to your favourite song, take a hot bath, read a book you really wanted to read for a while. As parents and carers, we tend to put the needs of our young people first but it's important to model self-care too. They learn by observing us so show them how to be kind to yourself.

4. PRACTICE GRATITUDE - it sounds like a cliché and the thought of it can even be annoying during stressful moments but studies show that daily gratitude practice improves our wellbeing. You can write a daily journal, download "5 Minute Journal" app (<https://www.intelligentchange.com/pages/five-minute-journal-app>) or simply start a day by listing three things you are grateful for. Don't worry about mundane ideas, just do it daily until it becomes a habit. You can also do it in the evening in the form of a small daily review.

5. PRACTICE A LITTLE BIT OF MEDITATION - you can do it with the free version of Headspace app (<https://www.headspace.com/>) or simply by making time to focus on the here and now. If you want to learn more, browse YouTube for video tutorials or visit the local community centre for more tips or even courses. Once you get the hang of it you will be able to meditate while walking, sipping a cup of tea or sitting on the bus. It's really just a state of mind, but it can help with a lot of stressful situations and build up our mental resilience levels.

SELF CARE TIPS

6. RECONNECT WITH NATURE - go for a walk, do some gardening, walk the dog, buy a new house plant, go for a bike ride. Make time for yourself. Slow down. Focus on small aspects of those activities. Reach out to local organisations to identify free or adorable outdoor activities. Join local walking or running groups. Choose an achievable and accessible activity.

7. DO SOMETHING NEW - yes, we can be very busy but doing something new, slightly out of the ordinary really stimulates our brain and can make us feel a bit more energetic. Choose a different route for your walk or discover a new part of your local area. Read a book on a new topic or join a new group. You can even learn something new, as long as it is achievable and fun for you.

8. MAKE TIME FOR QUALITY CONVERSATION WITH A TRUSTED FRIEND - book out an hour for a phone call or a meeting with a person who listens well and gets you. Spend time connecting with them and enjoying the time together.

9. MAKE TIME FOR YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CHILD - dedicate a day, an afternoon or even just a bedtime for a relaxed time together with your child, make it light and fun for both of you and use it as an opportunity to re-connect, joke, share activities and have deeper conversations too.

10. REVERSE ROLES GRATITUDE ACTIVITY - sometimes we take on too much as parents/carers so for this activity spend time exploring the following questions: what do you receive and learn from your young person? what do they give you? what do they do for you? what makes you proud of them? what moments with them bring you joy? how can you cultivate those feelings and create a safe space for more moments like this?

11. F-WORD ACTIVITY - make time to sit down and think about your approach to failure. Young people grow up in a very competitive world so it can be really helpful to learn to manage failure and as parents/carers, we have a great opportunity to model it for them. How do you celebrate failure? How do you feel about it? How do you deal with it? How can we help our young people with their experiences of failure? You can also discuss this with your young person - they might have their own ways and coping mechanisms too.

12. LEARN TO ASK FOR HELP - if you are stuck, worried or out of depth model asking for help. Sometimes it can be really difficult to even admit that we need to advise or help, but it's an important skill for us and for our young people as well. It's perfectly OK not to be OK sometimes but we should not struggle alone. At OTR Bristol we value the importance of collective mental health, so if you need support, do ask for it.

WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR YOUR SELF-CARE TIPS! EMAIL AT HELLO@OTRBRISTOL.ORG.UK OR TWEET US AT [@OTRBRISTOL](https://twitter.com/OTRBRISTOL)

URBAN DICTIONARY

(a.k.a The meaning of mental health terms)

Mental health terminology can be really overwhelming but it can also sometimes be misunderstood which makes the conversation with a young person harder. Sometimes we might not know the true meaning of a term, know its popular meaning or slang concept. In the meantime, our young people grow up using some of those terms differently depending on their context. So it's helpful to find a common language in order to help them talk to us and to mental health professionals about their potential worries. Here is a simple idea of how to practice talking about mental health.

Sit down with your young person, with two clean pages of paper and two pens. Look together at the below list of terms and concepts: empathy, mindfulness, resilience, self-care, OCD, addiction, bullying, anxiety, distress, body image, depressed, stigma.

Take 5 minutes to write down your personal definition or description of each term separately and then discuss it together. Use so-called open-ended questions (starting with words: why, how, who, where, what...) for example: how do you define this? what does this word mean to you? how would you explain it to your friend? Avoid closed questions that prompt simple yes or no answer. Avoid judging or correcting - just listen and then share your understanding of the terms. This activity is not about getting it right, but about finding a mutual understanding of our different perceptions.

If appropriate you can move to more complex terms: abuse, suicidal, death/bereavement, gender identity, identity, rumination, counselling, medication, self-harm, trauma, peer support - there is no rule, of course, so you need to adjust it to your knowledge of the young person and your own feelings around those terms. Try to mix negative with positive terms to make this activity/conversation more manageable for both of you.

Alternatively, you can focus on one term and just talk about that by starting with the question: I am wondering what "depressed" really means to you and your friends? How would you describe it? At OTR Bristol we believe in normalising conversations about difficult subjects to enable the connection between carers and young people. It's good to be understood and prepared for situations when talking about mental health might be really difficult. It's worth explaining to your young person at the end of this activity your intention to understand them a bit better.

USEFUL FACTS

Did you know...

By law, all state Schools should have a Bullying Policy in place that includes measures to prevent all forms of bullying (including name calling) amongst pupils. (Gov.uk, 2019). It may be called something else such as a Relationship Policy, or be part of an overall Safeguarding Policy.

There is no legal definition of bullying, however, it's usually defined as behaviour that is:

- repeated;
- intended to hurt someone either physically or emotionally;
- often aimed at certain groups, for example because of race, religion, gender or sexual orientation.

It takes many forms and can include:

- physical assault
- teasing
- making threats
- name calling
- cyberbullying - bullying via mobile phone or online (for example email, social networks and instant messenger)

If your child is suffering from bullying, (and particularly if this is affecting their wellbeing), do contact the school – either our tutor, head of house/year, the SENDCo or the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

If you are concerned about your child's/young person's mental health, do if possible keep the school updated. (Your child/young person may not wish you to do this, as they want their privacy. In this case you may have to wait until they are ready to share).

USEFUL FACTS

Did you know...

As part of their safeguarding duties, all schools should protect the privacy of their students, including their online privacy. This is also part of the new GDPR regulations which came into force in May 2018. It is not OK for another young person to have your child's password, or for all young people to have the same password to access their school accounts.

There are a number of organisations who can help with difficulties at school. Off The Record have Wellbeing Practitioners who visit some schools. The school may have Learning Mentors and/or a Counsellor. The school may refer you to Families in Focus, who work to support families. Leading Lights also provide tuition, mentoring, counselling and therapy, family support and advocacy.

Did you know...

By 2025 all schools should have a Mental Health Lead, who has overall responsibility for monitoring mental health in schools (staff and pupils)? At the moment for pupils/students, this is often the SENDCo or the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). The Mental Health lead will also have a contact within Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

The SENDCo is often responsible for inclusion, which includes those children struggling with mental health. Depending on the nature of the difficulty, the Designated Safeguarding Lead may be involved in some aspects of mental health.

Did you know...

If your child or young person needs urgent support, you can take them to A&E. (Mind, 2018).

Did you know...

1 in 10 children and young people are affected by mental health disorders. If children aged between 5 and 16 don't get the support they need, their problems will get worse. (The Children's Society, 2018; NHS England, 2019; Mental Health Task Force, 2016).

Did you know...

75% of all mental health problems are established by the time somebody is 18. By not giving children and young people the support they need at a young age, society is allowing their problems to manifest. With the right support at the right time, these problems can be managed and prevented. (The Childrens Society, 2018).

WHEN DOES MY CHILD BECOME EQUAL?

We have asked our Membership Team - young people supporting our Hubs - to tell us what makes a young person feel equal in the relationship with their parents and carers. Here's what they had to say:

"A good laugh - humility, being more approachable and human"

"Admitting mistakes"

"Sense of vulnerability and letting go, especially of your own world view and accepting ours"

"Consistency - not pretending to be someone your not"

"Taking to us in a respectful way"

"Try to see things from our perspective - don't say "when I was your age I did this" - our reality can be different"

"Explain our cultural heritage and allow us to choose the elements that fit our reality"

"Treat girls and boys equally, be fair"

"Rules can be a barrier or protection. Explain the rules - it helps to understand why they are there - most of the time to protect us, but we want to know"

"Stop fighting us, just listen. Really listen"

"Create a safe space for our rebellion"

HOW TO WRITE A CONTRACT/AGREEMENT

According to the parenting pyramid:

(http://www.incredibleyears.com/download/resources/parent-pgrm/Basic_Pyramid_Web.pdf)

mutually agreed rules help young people thrive. Here are a few things to consider when putting rules in place in the form of a mutual agreement:

1. **What is the intention/goal of this agreement?**
2. **What is our definition of a safe space/safe household/safe family? (Confidentiality, listening without judgement, choosing the right time to talk, feeling rested and ready to talk, respecting each other's opinions and world view)**
3. **Decision-making policy - who decides about rules? What are the consequences of not following the rules? Who do the rules apply to (all or just young people?)**
4. **Participation - what strategies will we use to ensure cooperation and equal distribution of tasks? What strategies for keeping people on task? The expected level of responsibility for tasks and deadlines.**
5. **Conflict - how are we going to manage it if there is a conflict?**
6. **What else should be in this agreement?**
7. **Are the points in this agreement S.M.A.R.T.? (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound)?**
8. **Do we all agree with this contract? (signatures)**

To find out more about the parenting pyramid, please check out the following links:

<https://goooddayswithkids.com/2017/12/08/parenting-pyramid/>

STRENGTHS-BASED EXERCISE

At OTR, practitioners may encourage your child or young person to think about their personal qualities, their strengths - the things they can be proud of. You can do this at home too...

All you need is -

- Uninterrupted time - but this doesn't have to be long
- Scissors - to cut the strengths based words up (found at the back of this booklet)
- Phone - you may want to take a picture afterwards as a reminder or something to cherish
- Your child or young person

After cutting out the words (including the blanks), place them loosely down on a table or the floor, wherever you and your child or young person choose to sit. Explain that they can go first, to select the words that they feel represent them best, then put them in a pile. If they get stuck, ask them to think about what a friend or relative might say about them. After they have chosen their words, it's your turn to select the words that you believe are their strengths. Use the blanks, if the word you are looking for is not their. After you have both chosen, place each of your words down (discard the remaining words) and take it in turns to read out why these words have been selected. Give examples if you can but most importantly, have fun and share the love. You can also ask your child or young person to pick words to represent your qualities.

LOVING	CURIOUS	HOPEFUL
KIND	CONFIDENT	FAIR
DETERMINED	HELPFUL	ENERGETIC
CREATIVE	INDEPENDENT	COMPASSIONATE
ENTHUSIASTIC	OBSERVANT	ARTISTIC
PATIENT	RESOURCEFUL	BRAVE
HONEST	WARM	ENTERTAINING
ACADEMIC	SPONTANEOUS	FUNNY
ATHLETIC	SOCIAL	GENEROUS
TRUSTWORTHY	SERIOUS	INTELLIGENT
APPROACHABLE	RESPONSIBLE	OPTIMISTIC
GENUINE	LOGICAL	

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

The Teenage Brain
by Frances E. Jensen

How to Talk so Teens Will Listen and Listen so Teens Will Talk
by Adele & Elaine Faber & Mazlish

Blame My Brain
by Nicola Morgan

It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens
by Danah Boyd

Get Out of My Life: The bestselling guide to living with teenagers
by Suzanne Franks

Overcoming your child's fears and worries
by Cathy Creswell and Lucy Willetts

The art of being a brilliant teenager
by Andy Cope

Living with a black dog
by Matthew Johnson

I had a black dog
by Matthew Johnson

Horse sense for people
by Monty Roberts

Helping your anxious child – a step-by-step guide for parents

**FOR
MORE
INFORMATION...**

USEFUL WEBSITES:

Young Minds

www.youngminds.org.uk

(also run a parents support telephone line - 0808 802 5544)

YoungMinds Crisis Messenger Service (24 hours) – text ‘YM’ to 85258 for support via text

Time to Change

www.time-to-change.org.uk

MindLine

(Weds-Sun, 8pm-12am) – 0808 808 0330

Samaritans

(24 hours) – 0117 983 1000 (local call charges apply) / 116 123 (free to call)

Papyrus HOPELine

(Mon-Fri: 10am-10pm / Weekends and Bank holidays: 2-10pm) –
0800 068 4141 or text 07786 209 697

MindYou

www.sites.southglos.gov.uk/mind-you/

Facebook

Parenting Mental Health

The Mighty

The Blurt Foundation

www.happymaps.co.uk

Leading Lights - www.leadinglightseducationandwellbeing.org.uk

Supportive parents - www.supportiveparents.org.uk



DO GOOD STUFF



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