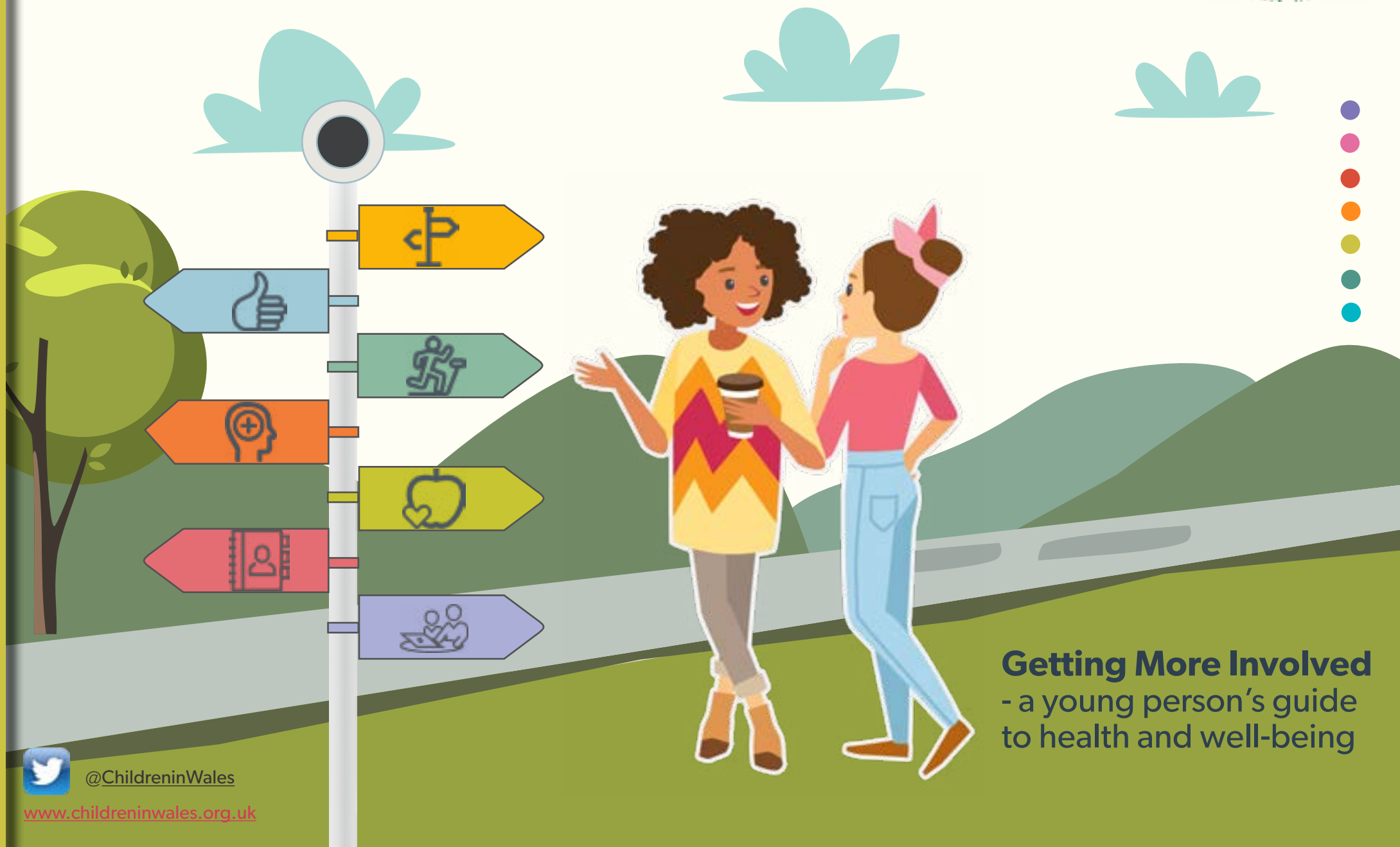




# Talking about mental health



**Getting More Involved**  
- a young person's guide to health and well-being



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## Talking about mental health

Mental health is an important issue for care experienced young people. Poor mental health can have a big impact on your confidence. It can make your education, your friendships and your ability to cope with different situations more difficult. It can also have a big impact on how you feel, what you eat, how much you move and your general health.

In this guide you will find out about different mental health issues that young people felt they wanted to know more about and how to access support if needed.

**One of the biggest things that young people talked about was the stigma of mental health and how it can be difficult to talk about some of these issues.**



For example, if you sprained your ankle and needed the help of crutches until you were able to walk on both feet again, you would go to the doctor, get some help, rest and recover. With mental health it can be more difficult to see what is wrong and some people can find it difficult to explain how they are feeling.

It's important to remember that mental health is just like physical health and sometimes people need support to keep going. By talking about how you feel and getting support when you need it means that you can recover more quickly and get back to doing all the things that you enjoy in life.

**Article 12** under the UNCRC states that you have a right to say what you think and be listened to.

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 says that you have a right to care and support if you need it. You can find out more about your rights and the Act in the Children's Rights, health and well-being guide.



# Stress

Stress is a feeling that you get when you are struggling to cope with things. It could be that you have too much to do or are trying to deal with a situation that is outside of your control. Stress is not a medical condition and is a normal feeling for everybody at times.

Stress in a small amount can actually help you to focus and get things done. You may feel stressed by exams, family pressures, bullying, labelling, and lots of other reasons. It becomes more difficult when you feel stressed a lot of the time as it can cause you to lose sleep, feel sick or worry about things.

**When you feel stressed all of the time this can lead to anxiety.**



# Anxiety

## What is it?

Around one in six young people will experience anxiety at some point in their lives. It is often described as a rush of fear or panicky feelings. Worrying about things is normal, especially if there is something like a big exam coming up or you have to speak in public. Usually though this feeling of worry goes away after the thing you are worrying about is over and done with.

Anxiety is when that feeling of fear, worry and panic continues and it can be difficult to calm down and feel safe.

*'I think because I am in care, sometimes I get labelled as 'a care kid' and that can make you feel bad or down, I think mental health can be worse for us sometimes'*

Care experienced young person aged 18.

## Signs and Symptoms:

Feelings of panic, fear and nervousness, difficulty sleeping, worried all the time, dry mouth, upset stomach, difficulty eating, not being able to sit still or feel calm, dizziness, irritable and low patience.

Panic attacks are extreme feelings of panic. They usually last for about 5 -20 minutes and can include feelings of a racing heartbeat, dizziness, feeling sick, sweating, shaking and shortness of breath.

Panic attacks can feel very frightening but typically the feelings pass and your body returns to normal. They can however leave you feeling overwhelmed, exhausted and scared it will happen again.



## Small things that I can do:

- **Stop and think** - what is it that is making you feel anxious? Try and write it down to notice if you're feeling more anxious at certain times or in certain situations
- **Exercise/Sport** - can really help to calm your mind if you have lots of busy thoughts
- **Relax** - take some time out to recharge by having a rest, reading, having a bath or listening to calming music
- **Mindfulness** - Paying more attention to the present moment, to your own thoughts and feelings, and to the world around you can help your well-being. Some people call this awareness 'mindfulness'. You can read more about Mindfulness on the [Mindfulness NHS web-page](#).

# Low mood

## What is it?

Most young people feel upset or sad at times by things happening in their lives. Low mood is when you feel sad all of the time and find it difficult to shake off the feeling and enjoy life. It can make going to school or socialising with friends difficult as you may find that you have no energy to do anything or go anywhere. It can be difficult to speak about especially if it is upsetting you.

## Signs and Symptoms:

Feeling sad or upset, not able to enjoy doing things or seeing friends, no energy to do anything, not able to eat much or overeating, difficulty sleeping or needing to sleep all the time, often tearful, feeling like there is no hope ahead.



### Small things I can do:

- **Socialise** - doing things you enjoy with friends can really help
- **Eat healthy** - when you eat healthily this is really good for your mood
- **Exercise/Sport** - can really help to boost your energy.



# Body Image

'I feel like there are a lot of negative stereotypes, of how people should look. And a lot of peer pressure to fit in which can all make you feel like not good enough. Some young people aren't confident with how they look'.

Care experienced young person, age 17.

What you think and how you feel about your body can have an impact on your levels of well-being, confidence and happiness. There can be a lot of pressure on young people to wear the right clothes, be a certain size and look like everybody else. Social media has an impact on the typical images that young people see every day. How you feel about your body can have an impact on your well-being and self-esteem but it can also have an impact on your physical health too.



# Self-harm

## What is it?

Self-harm is any behaviour that is deliberately intended to cause harm to yourself including cutting, taking an overdose or swallowing objects. It can be done for lots of different reasons and some young people may find it difficult to explain why they are self-harming.

Self-harm may be a way of dealing with hurt, sadness or anger but also could be a way of communicating distress or unhappiness. Self-harm can be a short term behaviour that is triggered by different stresses but can also be a longer term issue.



### Small things that I can do:

- Talk to somebody who is supportive and will listen to how you're feeling
- Try to express your feelings in a less harmful way - you could write down how you feel and then rip up the paper.



# The importance of sleep

Getting good sleep is important for staying healthy and feeling well. Sleeping well gives you the energy you need and boosts your immune system so that you are able to fight off illness. It also helps your brain recover and make sense of your day, storing your memories and creating new ideas. If you are feeling stressed, you may find it difficult to sleep which can leave you feeling more stressed!



### Top tips for getting a better night's sleep:

- Try to avoid having caffeine such as coffee, energy drinks and chocolate before bed
- Give yourself time before bed without your phone or tablet so that you can wind down
- Try to avoid having big meals before sleep or doing exercise that is particularly energetic.





## Steps forward

It is really important to know that it is ok to talk about any of these issues and get support if you feel this is the right thing for you. If after reading this guide, you feel that you want to take action and know more here are some options:

- You could talk to family member, your foster carer or friend who will listen and support you
- There is a lot of helpful information online including [Young Minds](#) which has a lot of reliable information on mental health
- You could discuss how you feel with an advocate who could share the information with your social worker or IRO if you want this to happen
- You could talk to somebody online from the list in the health support hub at the end of the Children's rights, health and well-being guide
- You can make an appointment with your doctor to talk about how you feel
- You can also talk to your nurse or school nurse who can give you advice and information.



## My Wishes and Feelings

You may want to write down any thoughts, wishes and feelings after reading this guide and share it with your social worker, advocate, nurse or doctor.

A large white rectangular box with a yellow border, intended for writing wishes and feelings. In the top right corner of the box, there is a yellow diamond-shaped icon containing a simple smiley face.