

# CHILD MENTAL HEALTH

Understanding child-related issues  
and how counselling can help



# CHILD-RELATED ISSUES

This booklet is aimed at parents, teachers, or carers of children looking for support and advice. It looks into different child-related issues, such as bullying, childhood bereavement, learning difficulties and depression and anxiety. It includes information on the treatment options available, such as counselling, and what you can do to support the child.

# UNDERSTANDING CHILD COUNSELLING

## Managing child-related issues

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# COUNSELLING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

**While many of us can seek support from friends and family, it's not always possible. Even as adults, it can be scary to ask for help, especially for our own mental health. So, consider how daunting it can be for a child. A child experiencing a mental health problem, or experiencing something they don't understand; how can they possibly know where to turn?**

The first thing to do is not jump to conclusions. Depending on their age, they may be talking to friends about how they feel. They may be talking to their teacher, or another person of authority at school, like the nurse or student support officer. It's not easy, but don't be offended if they aren't opening up to you - sometimes it can be more daunting talking to a parent, than another adult.

**If their behaviour has changed, consider what's happening in their life - is there anything that may have triggered their distress?**

Situations like moving house, divorce, bullying and bereavement can affect a child greatly, and stress can build when they don't know how to cope. Try talking to them through asking questions, and show your support. Even if they're not ready to talk, ensure they know you're there for them.

If you're worried about your child and things seem to be affecting their health, it may be time to consider further help.

**How is child counselling different?**

**COUNSELLING GIVES THE CHILD THE OPPORTUNITY TO TALK ABOUT HOW THEY FEEL WITHOUT THE FEAR OF JUDGEMENT.**

Speaking to a counsellor, away from their home and school life, can take away some of the pressure. Counselling offers a safe environment for children to express their feelings and understand what may have caused them to feel this way.

### **THE METHODS USED IN SESSIONS WILL DEPEND ON THE CHILD'S AGE, SITUATION AND THEIR DEVELOPMENT.**

There are a number of methods that may be used to encourage children to express their feelings better, such as through play and art. Reading stories and talking about the feelings of a specific character can help them understand the emotion and, in turn, encourage them to discuss their own feelings, while drawing, painting or drama can help the child express themselves better.

Older children may prefer talking therapy, or a mixture of both. This is down to the child and the counsellor, who will discuss the situation together to learn what method will be most beneficial.

Although different methods may be used for child counselling, the aim of counselling for both children and adults is the same; to help the individual cope better with their feelings and to enjoy life again.

## Benefits of child counselling

A few examples of how counselling can help children include; coping with everyday worries, such as exam stress, and relationship issues with friends, family members and teachers.

Counselling can also help with self-harm concerns, grief, depression and anxiety, and learning difficulties, to name a few.

Really, if something is making your child unhappy, however small you or they feel it is, it's important. Know that help is available - counselling allows your child to talk to someone about what's on their mind safely and confidently, without fear of judgement.

There is no right or wrong reason to why someone may consider counselling. Sometimes it's just good to talk to someone objective, other times more guidance may be needed.

## Common child-related issues:

Common child-related issues that can be managed with the support of a counsellor include:

- bullying
- learning difficulties
- behavioural problems
- depression and anxiety
- bereavement/loss
- attachment disorder
- separation anxiety

# BULLYING

Most people have been teased by a friend or a sibling at some point in their lives. It's normally playful, friendly and both of you will find it funny. But, sometimes it's not funny; there is a point when 'teasing' crosses a line.

If it becomes hurtful, unkind and is happening constantly, you're being bullied.

## What is bullying?

If someone is making you feel bad about yourself, causing you to be upset or physically hurting you, that is not OK. It doesn't matter who is doing it, where it takes place, or why - bullying is wrong.

**Bullying behaviour can be many different things. It could be:**

- being teased or humiliated
- having money or possessions taken
- being ignored and left out
- being hit, kicked or physically hurt
- being threatened or intimidated

This behaviour may take place face-to-face, on your phone, or online.

## Who does it?

It might be one person, or it could be a group of people. It might be someone you don't like, or it could be someone very close to you.

There are so many situations when and where bullying happens - but the important thing to remember is that this behaviour is wrong.

## Why am I being bullied?

There are so many reasons why people bully others. They might be unhappy with something in their own life and are taking it out on you. It may even be that their friends bully and they don't want to feel left out. Not always the case, but it is likely that the bully is being (or has been) bullied themselves. Whatever the reason, it's rarely simple.

## Am I a bully?

If you are bullying others, you may be worried about talking to someone for fear of getting in trouble. But, speaking to someone may help you understand why you are doing it and take the necessary steps to stop bullying.

**ALWAYS REMEMBER, WORDS CANNOT BE  
UNSAID AND ACTIONS CANNOT BE UNDONE.**

Recognising that what you have said or done was hurtful and wrong is the first step towards making things better.

Apologising can go a long way in helping the other person feel comfortable around you. You might be able to move forwards with them and even carry on a friendship by doing this. But, you might find that the other person is unable to forgive you - their feelings have been hurt too much. It might be hard, but you have to accept and respect that.

## Where does bullying happen?

### Bullying at school

Bullying can turn school into a scary and lonely place. If it is getting in the way of your learning, or your enjoyment of school, something needs to change. Your school should have an anti-bullying policy in place which will deal with the person, or people, in an appropriate way.

You will not get in trouble or be laughed at for reporting bullying. If you feel uncomfortable about doing this, speak to a member of staff that you trust, or ask a friend to go with you.

**IN A COUNSELLING DIRECTORY SURVEY OF 1300 PEOPLE, 55% ADMITTED BEING BULLIED AT SOME POINT IN THEIR LIVES.**

## Cyberbullying

**Cyberbullying refers to any kind of bullying that takes place on your phone, or online. It can include:**

- sending threatening or abusive messages via text, or on social media channels - this is called 'trolling'
- creating and sharing embarrassing images or videos of you
- hacking your personal accounts to send inappropriate messages
- sending explicit messages, also known as sexting

If you're being bullied online, there are things you can do to prevent it from happening. You can find out more about online safety by reading our [how to stay safe online page](#).

## Bullying at home

While your home should be a safe, comfortable place where you spend time with family and friends, this isn't always the case. It might be a sibling, a parent, or another member of your family - but someone is causing you to dread spending time at home.

## IT'S TIME TO TALK

If you aren't able to confront the bully directly, or another member of your family, try speaking to a friend or someone at school that you can trust. They may be able to help you confront the bully, or give you emotional support to help you feel more positive.

## How to overcome bullying

It can be hard but try to forget what the bullies have said to make you feel down, you are important, you are special and you deserve to be happy. Stay true to yourself - don't let anything that bullies say or do to you change you in any way.

## YOU ARE PERFECT JUST AS YOU ARE

It can be hard to be brave, but bravery is what it takes to make the change to stop this from happening.

Whether bravery comes in the form of confronting the bully directly, speaking to someone about what is happening to you, or reporting bullying behaviour - there are lots of ways to be brave.

**You don't have to do anything on your own. There's lots of support available, just be sure to seek it.**

Follow the advice that you would give to a friend if they were in your situation. What would you tell someone in your position?

## Talk about it

If you're under 16, talk to a trusted adult. That doesn't always need to be your own parents or a teacher. It could be the parent of a friend or another relative. They might be able to help you resolve the situation, or can help to connect you with other resources, charities or professionals that can help.

## Counselling

If you're over 16, and if you don't feel comfortable talking to someone you know, speaking to a professional may help. Counselling provides a safe space for you to discuss your concerns without fear of being judged.

A counsellor won't be able to stop the bullies from acting out towards you.

But, they can help you to process how you feel, to help you deal with any anger, frustration, or any other associated feelings. They might also be able to help you understand the mindset of the bully, to help you process why they might be doing this.

### **Advice for parents**

Bullying affects people in different ways, depending on the situation. Young people can be reluctant to talk about bullying so, as parents or caregivers, it can be difficult to know if they are struggling. If you're worried, take a look at our dedicated page to help you spot the signs of bullying.

[You can find more information for parents on our dedicated fact-sheet.](#)

[Visit our wall of hope to hear our visitors advice for anyone affected by bullying. Want to share your own message? Use our site to record a message of support.](#)

[If you're a teacher and you want to learn more, we also have a dedicated advice for teachers fact-sheet.](#)

# LEARNING DIFFICULTIES IN CHILDREN

**A person with learning difficulties may be described as having problems developing their knowledge and skills to the normal level expected of their peers, and others the same age.**

**ACCORDING TO THE MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION, 10% OF THE UK POPULATION IS AFFECTED BY DYSLEXIA.**

ADHD affects approximately 3 to 9% of school-aged children and young people. There is, however, no definitive record of how many people in the UK have learning difficulties.

This is because they are a 'hidden' problem, meaning they're not immediately known to others, or even to the person themselves.

**What's the difference between a learning difficulty and a disability?**

Generally, learning difficulties do not affect the general intelligence (or IQ) of an individual. A learning disability is a condition which affects the learning and intelligence of an individual across all areas of life.

For example, Dyslexia is classed as a learning difficulty, as it only affects the individual's ability to process information. Whereas, Down's syndrome is classed as a learning disability.

**When a person has a learning disability, it means they may find it harder to learn life skills than other people.**

The problems themselves may vary for each individual, but generally include aspects such as learning new things, communication, reading, writing, or personal care.

## THE SEVERITY OF LEARNING DIFFICULTIES CAN ALSO VARY.

A person with mild disabilities can mean they are able to live independently with minimum support. More severe disabilities may need 24-hour care and help to perform daily tasks and life skills.

### Counselling for learning difficulties

Learning difficulties can affect a person massively. This includes their education, work life, relationships and general daily life. The challenges of a learning difficulty can be difficult to cope with. Children may feel they're underachieving or are not as clever as their peers, but not understand why.

This confusion and lack of understanding can lead to feelings of

- frustration
- anger
- anxiety
- stress

Sometimes extra support can help - like speaking to a counsellor. This gives the person the opportunity to talk about how they feel and learn ways to cope.

A counsellor can also help those involved understand that there are many methods of support available.

Counselling at an early age can give the child the techniques needed to manage the learning difficulty, and cope with their feelings. Occupational therapy can be a helpful method for children who experience a difficulty with motor skills, while solution-focused counselling can be appropriate for older children.

Other techniques such as group and play therapy can help children develop social skills, which are often associated with learning difficulties.

### What are specific learning difficulties?

Specific learning difficulties (also known as SpLDs) is an umbrella term, used to cover a range of difficulties including:

- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia
- Dyscalculia
- ADD or ADHD

**ACCORDING TO THE MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION, IT'S ESTIMATED THAT THERE ARE 286,000 CHILDREN AGED 0-17 IN THE UK WITH A LEARNING DISABILITY.**

### Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a hidden disability and the most common of the SpLDs. Usually hereditary, the most visible signs of dyslexia are literacy problems. Dyslexia may mean a child mixes up letters within words, and words within sentences while reading. They may also have difficulty spelling while writing.

Dyslexia also affects the way information is processed and retrieved, meaning individuals may struggle with memory, perception of time, organisation and sequencing.

## Dyspraxia

Dyspraxia, also known as developmental coordination disorder (DCD) is a relatively common disorder.

### **DYSPRAXIA AFFECTS BETWEEN FIVE AND 10% OF THE UK POPULATION**

It affects the motor coordination in both children and adults. The difficulties presented by DCD can vary between individuals. They may change over time, depending on their daily lives, and persist into adulthood.

Dyspraxia can affect a person's coordination. This makes the functioning of everyday life difficult, such as in education and employment.

Children with DCD may experience difficulties in educational and recreational activities, such as self-care, writing and riding a bike.

Often, these continue into adulthood, as well as having difficulty learning new skills, like driving a car and DIY tasks.

## Dyscalculia

### **DYSCALCULIA IS DIFFICULTY UNDERSTANDING NUMBERS AND SYMBOLS.**

It's characterised by the individual having difficulty understanding simple number concepts and basic numeracy skills. But this isn't finding maths hard or not knowing larger sums and numbers.

Dyscalculia is a difficulty understanding numbers at a basic level, such as telling the time and understanding quantity, money and cost.

## ADD or ADHD

ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) is restlessness, erratic, unpredictable, inattention and inappropriate behaviour. Often unintentional, but individuals may interrupt and come across as aggressive.

If individuals don't appear hyperactive, the term ADD (attention deficit disorder) should be used. People with ADD may find it particularly difficult to focus, so appear 'dreamy' or as if they're not paying attention. ADHD is commonly associated with dyslexia.

If you're looking for more information on ADHD, please visit our fact-sheet.

SpLDs have also been linked with pre-existing difficulties, such as Asperger's Syndrome.

Children with SpLDs often find mainstream school and educational environments a struggle. They may feel as though they're not as smart as their peers and as a result, they may experience low self-esteem and lack confidence in their own ability.

The important thing to remember is that this isn't true. It is totally possible for someone with a learning difficulty to achieve their full potential.

**THERE IS PLENTY OF SUPPORT AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO HELP THEM DO EXACTLY THIS - AND MORE.**

# SEPARATION ANXIETY

**Separation anxiety is a condition where the child becomes nervous and fearful when separated from a parent, carer or are away from home.**

Generally, children will go through a clingy stage during their development. This is completely normal. It's natural for young children to feel a sense of anxiety when they're separated from their parents - after all, their parents are who they associate with love and safety. But if this behaviour continues, it may be a sign of separation anxiety.

**SEPARATION ANXIETY AFFECTS 4-9% OF CHILDREN AT ANY ONE TIME.**

A child with separation anxiety may experience physical symptoms (such as headaches and a sore tummy) at the mere thought of being away from a parent.

This fear of separation can be very distressing for the child, as well as the rest of the family. This upset can interfere with their development and ability to carry out normal activities, like going to school and making friends.

## Signs of separation anxiety

Separation anxiety is common in children aged between six months and three years.

So don't worry if they appear overly-attached. In fact, this is often a sign of how well you've bonded. We know how difficult it can be to leave when your child is crying, but this shouldn't last forever - they often grow out of it.

**MOST CHILDREN WILL GROW OUT OF THIS PHASE AFTER THREE YEARS.**

If their anxiety worsens or intensifies, however, there's a risk it may develop into separation anxiety disorder.

The following are some of the most common signs of separation anxiety disorder in children.

- The child has an unrealistic, continuous worry that if they're away, something bad will happen to the parent or carer, or themselves.
- They refuse to go to school.
- The child needs to sleep near the parent or refuses to sleep away from home.
- They have nightmares about being away.
- They're scared of being alone.
- Repeated tantrums or pleading when a parent leaves.
- They experience physical symptoms, such as headaches or sickness, especially on school days.

If you're worried about your child's anxiety, the first port of call is your GP. They can assess the situation and recommend suitable treatment, or refer you for further support.

### Why does it happen?

It is thought that separation anxiety can develop after the child has experienced significant stress or trauma. This may include an illness which led to a stay in hospital, the death of a loved one or a change in environment, such as moving house or changing schools.

**SEPARATION ANXIETY DOESN'T ONLY AFFECT CHILDREN, IN FACT, MANY PARENTS CAN EXPERIENCE SEPARATION ANXIETY TOO.**

Parents can feel guilty about leaving their child in such distress and may worry about their adjustment when starting school or going away. So, if a parent experiences separation anxiety, the child may pick up on the behaviours. This may lead to both parent and child feeding the other's anxiety.

### **How to handle separation anxiety**

Separation anxiety can make it incredibly difficult to leave your child in someone else's care (with a babysitter, or at school for example). When they are clinging to your leg, crying and screaming, it can leave you feeling distressed. Seeing your child cry can be very upsetting - you may worry about their adjustment, and the effects this is having on them.

**REMEMBER THAT FOR THE MOST PART,  
THIS IS AN ENTIRELY NORMAL REACTION.**

If this is a case of separation anxiety, however, and you and your child are experiencing a lot of distress, it can help to seek further support.

**Talk to loved ones about how you're feeling - trying to cope on your own can often leave you feeling exhausted and even more upset.**

And talk to your doctor. They will listen to your concerns and offer some advice on the next steps.

### **What support is available?**

Your doctor may refer your child to your local child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) for help and support. Depending on their age, your child may not want to speak to a doctor. That's OK.

Know that other resources are available, such as youth counselling services (set up specifically for young people to talk about what's worrying them) and online or telephone helplines.

Counselling can be helpful for both your child and the rest of the family, too. A counsellor is someone who can listen to your concerns, feelings and offer advice and coping techniques.

**Methods used will depend on age, but common counselling techniques for separation anxiety include:**

- cognitive behavioural therapy
- play therapy
- family therapy
- art therapy

## **Coping as a parent**

Being a parent isn't easy, and nobody likes to see their child upset. But separation anxiety can make you feel very alone, as though you're the only one feeling such stress. If you work, you may feel guilty leaving your child in distress. Perhaps you worry about how they're coping at school, without you. Maybe you just miss them needing you.

**While these feelings are totally normal, there are ways you can manage your stress:**

## **Stay busy**

Whether your child is away for the day at school, or away for the weekend, having a busy schedule you can keep your mind from wandering. Even if you don't really want to do anything, try to follow a routine and allow yourself to adjust.

## Enjoy the free time

Think of this as your chance to focus on you. Parenting takes all your time so when you get these moments, try and treasure them. Book a day of fun with your partner, get back into cooking, catch up with friends or finally start decorating the second bedroom.

## Seek peer support

Don't forget all the other parents around you, who probably understand how you feel or have been through similar situations. You can get together to discuss how you feel, or something different.

**YOUR FELLOW PARENTS AND FRIENDS ARE THERE TO SUPPORT YOU - LEAN ON THEM.**

## Have a positive attitude

Unfortunately, children are very skilled in picking up the emotions of those around them. If you're feeling sad or nervous, it's likely they will pick up on some of this. Parental separation anxiety can often transfer to children, making their own anxieties more intense and in turn, cause you distress.

**Try to remain enthusiastic and have a positive attitude when talking to your child, so to avoid them getting upset or feeling guilty for leaving.**

## Swap a treasure

If you and your child are worrying about being separated, suggest a treasure swap. You can either make each other a trinket, or give them something you care about and ask them to give you something in return. These small treasures act as comforters, reminding you of each other when you're separated.

# DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY IN CHILDREN

**Just like adults, children have worries and anxieties. There are many things that can affect a child, and at different ages. While these are a normal part of growing up, if it's starting to affect their overall health and well-being, extra support may be needed.**

**ACCORDING TO YOUNG MINDS, ONE IN SIX YOUNG PEOPLE WILL EXPERIENCE ANXIETY.**

Anxiety is the feeling of fear or panic. Most of us when worried about something, like an exam or presentation, will calm down and feel better after the event is over. But for some people, this feeling doesn't go away. When the panic stays or grows even stronger, anxiety can become a problem. For children, this can be very scary and confusing.

**UP TO 5 STUDENTS IN A CLASSROOM MAY BE LIVING WITH SOME FORM OF ANXIETY.**

## **Anxiety in children**

Anxiety in children becomes a problem when it affects their daily life. Because it's a normal reaction, a parent may not know what their child is feeling, and so the severity of the anxiety is not always clear. Also, there are many times a child will experience anxious feelings throughout their childhood.

For example, between eight months to three years, separation anxiety is common. This is, however, a normal stage in a child's development, and tends to ease off at around two years.

**It's when the feelings don't go away that further steps need to be considered.**

Young children experiencing anxiety may not understand their feelings, or know how to express them, so it's important you know the signs to spot.

#### Signs of anxiety in children include:

- irritable, clingy or tearful behaviour
- difficulty sleeping / waking in the night
- nightmares
- lack of confidence
- lack of concentration
- loss of appetite
- avoiding everyday activities, like socialising or going to school

#### Depression in children

Depression is a mood disorder which often develops alongside anxiety. While it's normal to feel down some of the time, when sad thoughts are lasting a long time or stopping someone from enjoying life, it can help to talk to someone - like a professional.

Depression is one of the most common mood disorders.

**IN FACT, THE NHS SUGGESTS THAT ALMOST 1 IN 4 YOUNG PEOPLE WILL EXPERIENCE DEPRESSION BEFORE THE AGE OF 19.**

Many signs of depression are similar to when a person feels sad, so it can be difficult to know when there is a problem. But if you think your child is depressed, it's important to seek help as early as possible.

#### Signs of depression in children include:

- sadness, or low mood
- being irritable or grumpy
- they're always tired
- having trouble sleeping
- isolating themselves from loved ones
- low confidence
- talking about feeling worthless/guilty

Some children may also show physical symptoms, like feeling sick or headaches.

## Other mental health problems

It's common for those experiencing depression to be experiencing another mental health problem.

Coping with a mental health problem can be extremely difficult and affect a person's life greatly, so it's often thought this can trigger depression.

Mental health problems linked to depression and anxiety may include:

### Eating disorders

Eating disorders are very complex and serious mental illnesses. Young women (aged 12 to 20) are more likely, but anyone, regardless of age or gender, can develop an eating disorder. While eating disorders are suggested to claim more lives than any other mental health problem, they are treatable and a full recovery is possible.

## Self-harm

Self-harm is purposely causing yourself harm, usually as a way to cope with difficult emotions.

**SELF-HARM IS THOUGHT TO BE MOST COMMON IN THOSE AGED BETWEEN 11 AND 25, BUT ANYONE CAN BE AFFECTED.**

While the cycle of self-harming can be difficult to stop, help is available.

## Obsessive-compulsive disorder

OCD is an anxiety-related condition, where people have obsessional thoughts, followed by compulsive urges. People can experience OCD differently, and at varying severity. It can leave you feeling helpless, and as if it's taking over your life.

However, treatment is available and there are methods you can learn to help you cope.

## What can you do to help your child

If you think your child may be depressed, or experiencing anxiety, it's important you talk to them. They may not understand what they're feeling or know how to talk about it, but reassure them that you're there and that they can talk to you when they're ready.

Don't judge what they say, or make it seem like it's not important. Whatever is causing the problem is affecting them, so take it seriously. Then, together you can talk about overcoming the problem.

**Reassure them that it's OK and they won't feel like this forever.**

If they don't want to speak to you, let them know you're there if they need you, but encourage talking to someone else.

Speaking to someone they trust, outside of their immediate family, can be just as beneficial.

### **SUGGEST TALKING TO A FRIEND, A GRANDPARENT, OR A TEACHER.**

If you're worried about their health, make an appointment with your GP. They can assess the situation, speak to your child and if necessary, refer your child for specialist help.

For younger children, look at how they're playing. Children may find it difficult to express themselves verbally, but they're masters at expressing themselves through play.

**If they're particularly stressed or upset for example, you may notice lots of fighting with their toys.**

**Ask them about this** - observing their play and commenting on the fights can help your child to open up and help you understand what's bothering them.

### **Counselling and further support**

Sometimes, talking about how they feel is enough to make someone feel less overwhelmed.

But if your child's health is being affected - both mentally and physically - then further support may be needed.

As a parent, or someone who cares for this child, it's difficult to accept that extra support is needed, but it's OK.

### **REACHING OUT FOR SUPPORT IS ADMIRABLE AND NOTHING TO BE ASHAMED OF.**

If you're worried about your child, you will take the necessary steps to help them enjoy life again - sometimes, this means talking to a counsellor.

### **What is a counsellor?**

A counsellor is someone who can listen to how your child feels. They can help them understand the emotions and teach them the steps to cope.

# BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS

**There are many reasons why a child may not be behaving properly. A young child may show difficult behaviour because they're tired, hungry, overexcited, bored or frustrated.**

While most children will go through a phase where they push the limits, if the problem behaviour is causing distress - to you, the child or the rest of the family - it's important you address it.

## **What are behaviour problems?**

Children will go through a number of different phases during development. As they become more independent, both toddlers and adolescents will challenge you and experiment with how far they can push it.

Children will typically learn how to behave as they go through school, with the help of parents, carers and teachers.

New emotions can also catch children unawares, and so they don't always know how to process their feelings and react in a more challenging way. While a child will occasionally lose their temper or have an aggressive, destructive outburst, it's not normally a cause for concern.

**However, if the problem behaviour continues for a long time, or the child or other members of the family are being affected by the behaviour, extra help may be needed.**

**DON'T WORRY THOUGH - THIS BEHAVIOUR WILL USUALLY EASE AS THEY GROW UP.**

## Signs to look out for

As a parent, it can be hard to admit that you may need some extra help in managing your child. If your child is showing aggressive behaviour and lashing out, you may be reluctant to talk about it - with anyone.

You may feel ashamed of your child's behaviour and not want to discuss it, out of fear of being judged. But keeping it to yourself can be very lonely.

**For the benefit of the child, yourself and the rest of the family, it's important you seek support as soon as possible.**

Behavioural problems can occur in children of all ages. Some may only experience minor difficulties, while others may have more serious behaviour problems, such as conduct disorder.

### If you're worried about a child, consider the following:

- Is the problem behaviour continuous (lasting several months or longer)?
- Are they repeatedly lashing out, being disobedient or aggressive?
- Is their behaviour out of the ordinary?
- Are they seriously breaking the rules at school or at home?

### What is conduct disorder?

Behaviour problems can affect a child's development and in some cases, affect their ability to live a normal life.

### **THIS IS A SIGN OF A MORE SERIOUS BEHAVIOUR PROBLEM, CALLED CONDUCT DISORDER.**

A child with a conduct disorder may be involved in violent, physical fights with other children. They may lie and steal, without showing any remorse or guilt. Children with a conduct disorder may skip school and avoid coming home, staying out all night.

Teenagers with a conduct disorder may start taking more risks with their health, such as drug and alcohol abuse.

In younger children, where the behaviour problems are happening within the home, they may be diagnosed with having ODD (oppositional defiant disorder).

Conduct disorder can be very distressing for the child and their family. The child may find it difficult to make friends and struggle to understand social situations. They may be highly intelligent, yet find school difficult and therefore show anger and blame others in order to cope.

### What causes conduct disorder?

There is no single cause of conduct disorder, but there are a number of factors believed to increase the likelihood of a child developing the behaviour problem.

### Common factors thought to increase the likelihood of conduct disorder include:

- If a child has learning difficulties.
- If they've been bullied or experienced a traumatic past.
- If they're experiencing a mental health problem, such as anxiety or depression.
- If they're involved with other 'difficult young people' and substance abuse.

### What support is available?

**DEALING WITH BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS AND RECOGNISING ANY RELATED DIFFICULTIES IS IMPORTANT AND CAN GIVE YOUR CHILD A BETTER CHANCE FOR THE FUTURE.**

Treatment will depend on the severity of the problem, age and circumstance of your child, but can include home-based support, such as parenting groups and school support, and specialist services, such as counselling.

Many children with behaviour problems will find school difficult, so classroom support may be beneficial.

Contact the school to learn what services are available.

They may be able to provide your child with extra support in lessons, or individual help to develop social skills.

If you're worried about your child's health and behaviour, professional support is available.

You can visit your GP for advice, who may be able to refer you to the local child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS).

**COUNSELLING CAN GIVE YOU AND YOUR CHILD THE SPACE YOU NEED TO TALK ABOUT WHAT'S GOING ON, WITHOUT FEAR OF JUDGEMENT.**

Treatment methods may include talking therapy and behavioural therapy, which help your child express how they're feeling and learn how to cope with their emotions in a safe, effective way.

Specialists in child behaviour and health can help to assess the behaviour and suggest ways they can improve. Alternatively, you can look for a private counsellor.

# CHILD BEREAVEMENT

**For a child, the world in many ways is still relatively unknown. Experiencing the harsh realities of the death of a loved one, and encountering grief for the first time, can make their world even more confusing.**

Add to this a family unit in its own state of grief and distress, this can become an unsettling time in a child's life.

**ACCORDING TO WINSTON'S WISH, 41,000 CHILDREN ARE BEREAVED EVERY SINGLE YEAR IN THE UK.**

While it would be comforting to assume that children are too young to feel the deep emotions that grief can bring, we know this is not so.

**But with plenty of love, help and support from the people around them, they can get through this sad time.**

## **Helping your child**

As adults, it's natural to want to protect children. But what we often don't realise is that children are much more perceptive and resilient than we'd think - as long as they are told in an appropriate way. So, it's best to be honest about what has happened as soon as you are able to.

Delaying a conversation with them might make it harder for yourself, as well as for the child.

## **Accepting loss**

You might think that you know your child inside and out, but grief is a powerful thing. It can affect us all in strange and different ways - so try not to show surprise at the way your child processes their feelings, even if they don't deal with the news as you'd expect.

Children have a limited ability to put their thoughts and feelings into words. Because of this, they might 'act out' in their behaviour, rather than express themselves verbally. This can be hard for both of you, but with your patience and guidance, they may gradually be able to express themselves more openly.

### How much do I tell them?

**There will be many factors that affect their understanding and reaction to what has happened, some of these factors include:**

- the age of the child
- their relationship with the person
- the general circumstances, or how the person died
- how the family expresses feelings and communicates
- how naturally resilient the child is

Be mindful of these factors when talking to the child - particularly of their age. The idea of death can be hard to understand, especially for the very young.

Explaining things simply, using real words like "dead" might feel uncomfortable for you, but they are easier for a child's understanding. Euphemisms such as 'lost' or 'gone to sleep' may seem kinder, but they can be confusing for a child.

**TRY TO ONLY GIVE AS MUCH INFORMATION AS THE CHILD WANTS: LET THEM ASK YOU QUESTIONS.**

This will prevent you from overloading the child with information they do not want or need yet. You know how much information is appropriate for the child and what they are able to understand.

So, trust your gut instinct in this process - it is best to try and be honest, but if there's something you're not comfortable telling them, don't. Information can always be added at a later date if needed.

## Experiencing pain

Children have a limited ability to put their thoughts and feelings into words. Because of this, they might 'act out' in their behaviour, rather than express themselves verbally. This can be hard for both of you, but with your patience and guidance, they may gradually be able to express themselves more openly.

**It is important to allow children to process their grief in their own way.**

Mourning is an important part of the bereavement process. Tell them that it is OK to feel sad and they don't have to hide how they feel from you.

But bear in mind that children are naturally able to dip in and out of their grief. It's normal for a child to be intensely sad one minute, then be playing happily the next. Do not be alarmed if this is the case

### **- THIS IS KNOWN AS 'PUDDLE-JUMPING'.**

This is a coping mechanism which helps prevent the child from being overwhelmed by powerful feelings.

As well as going through lots of different emotions, your child might show physical signs of grief such as bedwetting, nightmares or tummy aches. Your GP can help with these, and can also put you in touch with children's counselling services to help them process their emotions.

## Do I let them see me upset?

If your child has just lost an important person in their life, it's likely that you have, too. You might be trying to help your child process their loss, but you also need to process your own feelings.

**Remember, as much as your child is the focus of your life, you need to look after yourself too.**

Be mindful of your behaviour in front of your child, but it is by no means necessary to hide your feelings from them. Children learn how to grieve by copying the responses of adults around them - they are relying on you to provide them with what they need to support them in their grief.

You might be worried about them seeing you upset, but showing your grief may encourage them to share theirs.

You're not alone in this. There is more information available on our bereavement page.

### What helps grieving young people?

You might think that keeping the child at home, off school and away from the questions of their peers might be the best thing to do. You want to protect them from any more hurt. But sometimes normality and a continued sense of routine is just what they need; stability and security.

They need to know that everything is going to be ok, even if it feels like their world is falling apart right now. Reassurance comes from things that are familiar; regular mealtimes, regular bedtimes and friendly faces around them - their teachers and school friends. This will provide an additional outlet of support, if needed.

As well as familiar places and faces, there is opportunity to introduce specialists who can help with your child's grief.

### Support organisations for bereaved families

There are many children's bereavement charities and resources available to you and your family.

#### Charities include:

- Child Bereavement UK
- Grief Encounter Project
- Winston's Wish

Help 2 Make Sense is one such resource by Winston's Wish, available for young people to help them make sense of their loss.

## What is bereavement counselling for children?

Many children can find comfort in attending bereavement counselling sessions. This can give children the chance to express their emotions in a safe environment that is an alternative to their own homes.

Particularly if the child is finding difficulty in opening up, they might find it easier to do so in a neutral environment, away from familiar faces.

**Trained, experienced counsellors who work with bereaved children will have a variety of activities to help children work through their grief.**

They will be able to provide you with further information and resources for helping your child.

**This is a difficult time, but the child is lucky to have you to support them - you will get through this together.**

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# ATTACHMENT DISORDER

**As soon as a child is born, they begin to develop a deep bond with their parents or main caregivers. This attachment is what helps us learn and develop in a trusting, loving environment. It helps us develop the ability to express emotion and learn how to build relationships. We know even from a young age, that we are loved and our parents are there for us.**

But, this bond isn't formed for all children. While there are many reasons why this attachment isn't formed, typically there will be a situation where the caregiver is unable to provide the necessary care and attention. This may be due to neglect, the child being abused, separation or another reason.

**Whatever the cause, this lack of attachment can lead to a number of difficulties for the child, and in severe cases, a condition called reactive attachment disorder.**

## **Attachment difficulties**

By the age of nine months, most babies will have developed a close bond with their caregiver. They will know who to rely on for food, shelter, love and protection. For this reason, it's common for babies aged between six and nine months to go through a 'clingy' stage. They will get upset when separated from their parents, as they associate them with safety.

But these bonds aren't always made. When the security and safety element is lost, the child can find it extremely difficult to cope with new experiences and form bonds with others.

When this bond is not made, the child can be at risk of developing behavioural and emotional difficulties. If untreated, there is a risk of developing mental health problems in later life.

## Signs of an attachment disorder

### Common signs of an attachment disorder in children include:

- a lack of eye contact
- problems expressing anger
- a need for control
- difficulty showing affection
- seeks affection from strangers
- difficulty showing remorse or regret after bad behaviour

### For very young children, the following behaviours may also indicate an attachment problem:

- They dislike being touched.
- They show little to no affection towards their caregivers.
- They appear anxious or tearful.
- They avoid interaction with other children.
- They give little response (and doesn't smile) when interacting with adults.

The effects of attachment difficulties work on a spectrum. Some will experience minimal effects, and for others, the effects can be traumatising. But there are treatments available and there are ways to overcome these issues, even as an adult.

### How counselling can help

### IF A CHILD IS EXPERIENCING ATTACHMENT DIFFICULTIES, SEEKING A DIAGNOSIS FROM A PROFESSIONAL SHOULD BE YOUR NEXT STEP.

Symptoms will be assessed and if the child is showing signs of attachment disorder, a physical examination may be needed. If there is no physical cause, a mental health professional will be required to assess the child's symptoms and offer a diagnosis.

If left untreated, these problems can worsen and may lead to further behavioural problems. For this reason, the earlier the problems are addressed, the better.

Treatment for attachment difficulties will typically involve a combination of counselling and parental guidance.

### For children with attachment disorder, treatment may include:

- play therapy
- individual counselling
- family therapy

For children of school age, special education programmes may also be recommended. This can help them develop the skills needed for academic success, while also addressing any behavioural and emotional problems they may have.

### Advice for parents

Being a parent to a child with insecure attachment can be both physically and emotionally challenging. You'll likely feel exhausted, angry and hurt, but be assured that your efforts are worth it.

**Attachment disorders can be treated and as difficult as it is, with time and patience, a bond can be developed.**

To help a child with attachment problems, be sure you:

### Have realistic expectations

It's a long journey and it won't be easy, so try not to think too far ahead. It's important you focus on small achievements and celebrate these each time.

### Be patient

Your patience is an essential part of this process. Prepare yourself for bumps along the way and focus on small improvements - this will help create a safe, comforting atmosphere for your child.

### Share joy

Joy and humour go a long way when it comes to managing attachment difficulties, even during a stressful time. For the benefit of both you and the child, be sure to have a couple of activities that make you feel good.

## Stay positive

Children can pick up on emotion easily and if you've lost hope, they'll start to feel that too. If they sense you're giving up or feeling discouraged, they'll know and this can only knock them further.

Try to remain hopeful and turn to friends for support when you're feeling down.

## Ask for help and seek further support

If you can, rely on your friends and family for support. See what support is available locally to you - in the form of community resources or parent support groups. It's difficult but try to ask for help before you really need it - leaving it until you're at breaking point won't help anyone.

If you can't turn to friends, consider seeking professional help. A counsellor can be there to listen to you, as well as offer guidance and advice.

## Mental health statistics

- 1 in 10 children and young people are affected by a mental health problem.
- Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) affects one in 25 people in the UK.
- Depression is a common mental disorder that affects nearly 80,000 children and young people

## Counselling

Children and young people may benefit from professional support. Counselling provides the young person with the opportunity to explore their feelings. The counsellor is someone to listen and offer support to the child, who may otherwise feel alone.

## Common forms of therapy:

- cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)
- cognitive analytical therapy (CAT)
- arts therapies
- counselling and psychotherapy
- mindfulness
- play therapy

# FURTHER HELP

## **Kidscape**

020 7730 3300

[info@kidscape.org.uk](mailto:info@kidscape.org.uk)

Anti-bullying charity working to prevent bullying and protect young lives.

## **NSPCC**

0800 800 5000 helpline (adults)

0800 1111 helpline (children)

[help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)

Specialises in child protection and the prevention of cruelty to children.

## **Samaritans**

24-hour helpline: 116 123

[samaritans.org](http://samaritans.org)

Emotional support for anyone feeling down, experiencing distress or struggling to cope.

## **Young Minds**

0808 802 5544

[youngminds.org.uk](http://youngminds.org.uk)

The UK's leading charity championing the wellbeing and mental health of young people.

## **Childline**

0800 1111

[childline.org.uk](http://childline.org.uk)

Free 24-hour helpline for children and young people in the UK.

## **Mind**

0300 123 3393

[info@mind.org.uk](mailto:info@mind.org.uk)

A mental health charity, dedicated to making sure no one has to face a mental health problem alone.

## **Relate**

0300 100 1234

[relate.org.uk](http://relate.org.uk)

Offers parenting guidance and information to parents of troubled teenagers.

# COUNSELLING DIRECTORY

Counselling Directory is a website dedicated to supporting you on your journey. While we all have our own ways of coping, information and support can make a huge difference.

At Counselling Directory, we believe everyone deserves happiness and know how daunting asking for help can be - but we're here to help. Wherever you are on your journey, know that change is possible.

Our team is passionate about counselling and want to promote the huge benefits talking therapy that have. We know how important it is to find a counsellor you resonate with, and we are dedicated to making that process as easy as possible.

0333 3447 990

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[www.counselling-directory.org.uk](http://www.counselling-directory.org.uk)

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