

MENTAL HEALTH

This fact sheet has been written by parent carers for parent carers.



Life brings many additional challenges for our children, not only because they may feel acutely aware that their disability makes them 'different' to their peers but also because they may be more vulnerable to some mental health conditions because of their disability. Some children with autism, for example, can be more likely to develop conditions such as anxiety, depression, or obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD).

Adolescence in particular can be a challenging time. The physical changes of puberty are accompanied by psychological changes that can affect young people's behaviour and emotional wellbeing. And the social pressures that all teenagers face can be more acute for children with disabilities, which can lead to fragile self-esteem and higher anxiety.

It's also important to flag that mental health issues can sometimes be harder to recognise in children and young people with disabilities. This might be because of communication difficulties, the complexity of their condition or the fact that mental health issues can be confused with their existing condition.

Signs that something may be wrong

It's natural for us all to go through difficult patches where we may feel more anxious, stressed or down. Often, we can get through these times without needing outside help or support, as long as we are fairly resilient and our self-esteem is in good shape (for more on this see our fact sheet on self-esteem). If you notice that your child is having difficulties, it may be that talking to you, or a trusted friend of the family will be enough to help them to resolve their difficulties.

However, sometimes a problem can be harder to resolve and it may be that your child will need the help and support of people outside the family. You may notice, for example that your child is more anxious, or is becoming isolated and withdrawn from friends and family. Their sleep may be affected and you may also notice that their personal hygiene is neglected. Similarly, you may notice changes in their behaviour. They may be more irritable and may possibly harm themselves or others.

If your child has a learning disability, it may be harder to ascertain what is going on. You may just feel that something is 'off', that there has been a change in the way that they communicate, their behaviour has changed, that they are sleeping more or less, or they are no longer enjoying their favourite activities. It's important to trust your instincts and speak to professionals if you have concerns.

Getting outside help

The first step when you notice a problem with your child or young person is to speak to other people who deal with them regularly. It's a good idea to note down everything that you are worried about so that you can raise all of your concerns when you talk to professionals.

If your child is still in education, you could speak to their school or college about your concerns as they may be able to offer support such as counselling. If the school or college feel your child needs additional support, they can refer them to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). If your child is not comfortable with opening up about their mental health issues with someone from school, you could speak to their GP or paediatrician who can also make a referral to more specialist mental health services.





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CAMHS help with a wide range of mental health problems for children and young people. CAMHS workers are based in the community or in clinics and include practitioners such as therapists and psychiatrists. If your child has a sudden or serious mental health crisis they should be treated urgently.

All other referrals to CAMHS will be assessed & prioritised according to need, but there may be a wait for whatever treatment is considered appropriate. Anyone can now also self-refer to CAMHS via the Single Point of Access (SPoA), detailed below. This may result, however, in your child or young person being directed to the most appropriate source of support locally, including local charities who can support mental wellbeing.

Ask About

- **Autism and Social Communication Team (ASCT)** – Specialist teachers that schools can refer to for expert advice about the educational, social and emotional development of pupils with Autistic Spectrum Conditions or Social Communication Difficulties.
See: <https://westsussex.local-offer.org/services/114-autism-and-social-team-inclusion>.
- **Disability Living Allowance (DLA)** – your child may qualify for DLA, a state benefit that will help with their care. For further information visit www.gov.uk/disability-living-allowance-children.
- **Find it Out Centres** - where young people aged 11-25 can drop in for information, advice and guidance. These are housed within your local Family Hub which you can find at: www.westsussex.gov.uk/education-children-and-families/find-a-family-hub.
- **Reaching Families** – provides training, information & other fact sheets related to this topic. See especially our fact sheet on *Building Self-Esteem* and our training workshops on *Making Sense of Anxiety*. The *Making Sense of Wellbeing* course for parent carers may be useful too. We also offer benefits advice, peer support, a Facebook group & handbook (see below) for parent carers of children & young people with SEND in West Sussex. See: www.reachingfamilies.org.uk.
- **Single Point of Access (SPoA) West Sussex** - a dedicated route to access specialist emotional wellbeing and mental health support for those aged 4-17. Anyone can refer to SPoA including children & parent carers. Referrals will be directed to the most appropriate help from Youth Emotional Support, YMCA Dialogue or Sussex Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Alternatively, signposting to other sources of support may be given. To make a referral, use the online form at: <https://e-wellbeing.co.uk/support> or tel: **0300 304 0462**.
- **Sussex Mental Health Line** – a free, 24/7 mental health crisis line for everyone who may be in crisis and in urgent need of help with their mental health. Call **NHS 111** and **select the 'mental health option'**. Alternatively, call **0800 030 9500**. The service is for people concerned about their own mental health or that of a relative, friend or someone they care for. It also supports children & young people. During busy periods, you may need to wait for someone to answer your call. If you would prefer not wait, you can use the **free crisis support text messaging service** instead. Text the word **SUSSEX** to **85258** for a confidential text-based conversation with a trained volunteer.
- **West Sussex Children's Services** – support from health and social care. If your child is under 18, contact the Integrated Front Door (IFD) for West Sussex Children's Services. Tel: **01403 229900** or email: WSChildrenservices@westsussex.gov.uk. The IFD is also an entry point for the Children with Disabilities (social care) service for children & young people with severe and/or complex disabilities. Eligibility criteria apply – See: <https://westsussex.local-offer.org/services/265>. For over 18s call the Adults' CarePoint: **01243 642121**, or email: socialcare@westsussex.gov.uk.
- **Young Minds** – is a UK charity for children & young people's mental health. They offer information and support to parents & children on a range of topics. They also have a parent helpline on: **0808 802 5544** and webchat service at: www.youngminds.org.uk.





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- **Your Space** – advice and information for young people run by West Sussex county council. Includes information on mental health and emotional wellbeing and links to other websites and sources of information. Go to: www.westsussex.gov.uk/education-children-and-families/your-space.

Further information and useful links

- ***Making Sense of it All: From Birth to Adulthood*** – Reaching Families' handbook for parent carers of children and young people with SEND in West Sussex. This provides essential information on money matters, including claiming DLA and PIP, as well as social care, health, leisure, travel, education and employment. Go to: www.reachingfamilies.org.uk/guides.html.
- **Contact** – a national charity for families who have a child/young person with a disability. It holds information and resources on mental health & also runs a helpline. Go to: <https://contact.org.uk> or call: **0808 808 3555**.
- **Mental Health Foundation** – Has information on children & young people with learning disabilities. Go to: www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/publications/children-and-young-people-learning-disabilities-and-their-mental-health.
- **Mind** – the national mental health charity, has a wide range of resources and information at: www.mind.org.uk.
- **Samaritans** – 24-hour help for people who are feeling anxious, depressed or suicidal. You can also call if you are worried about someone else. Tel: **116 123** or go to: www.samaritans.org.
- **Scope** – has information about mental health & disability. Call their helpline on **0808 800 3333**, visit: www.scope.org.uk/advice-and-support/manage-mental-health, or email: helpline@scope.org.uk.
- **West Sussex Local Offer** – go to: <https://westsussex.local-offer.org> for local services, support and details of *Short Breaks* providers for children & young people aged 0 - 25 years with SEND.
- **Youth Access** – provider of young people's advice and counselling services: www.youthaccess.org.uk.

