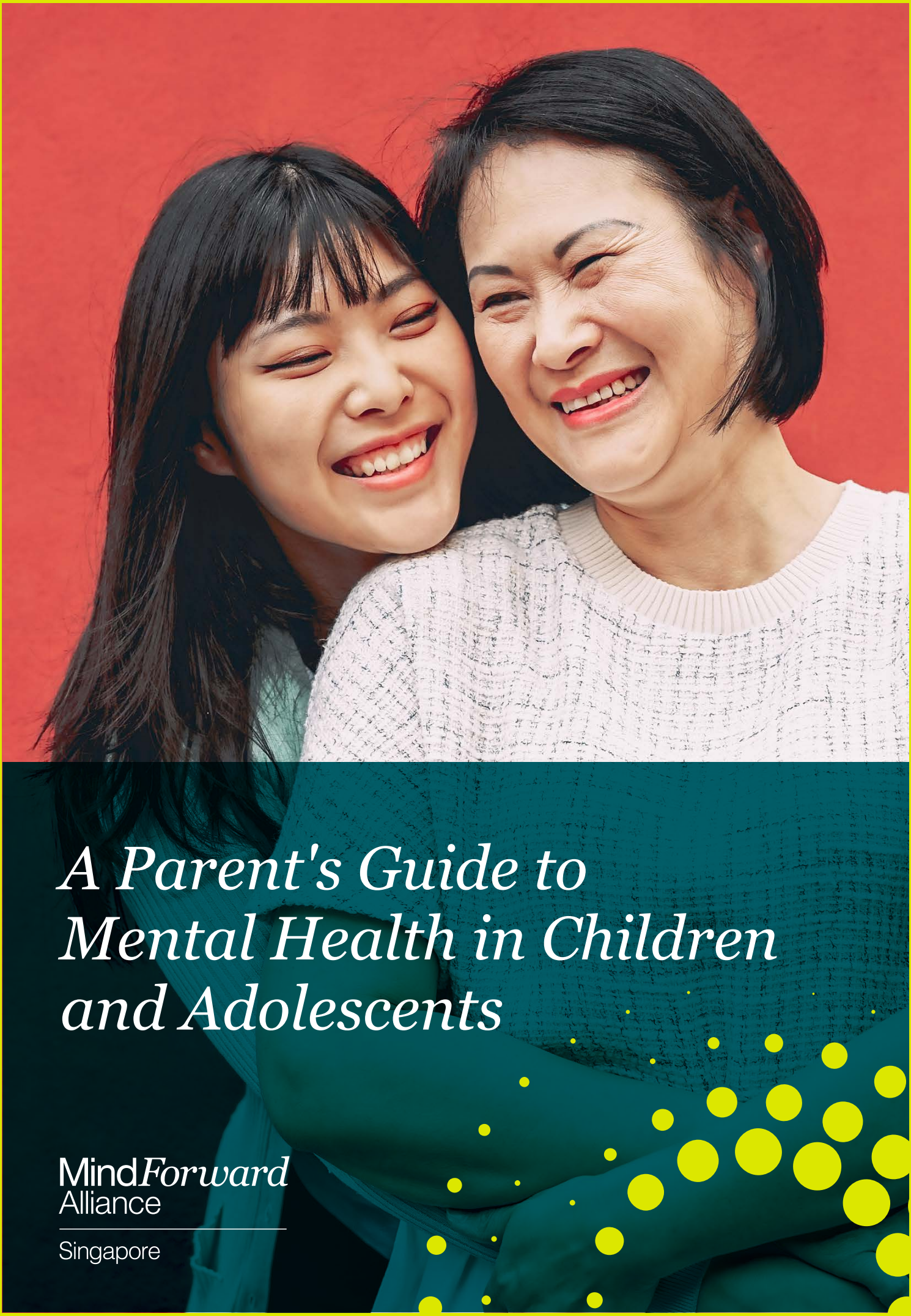


A Parent's Guide to Mental Health in Children and Adolescents

MindForward Alliance

Singapore

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This is an interactive pdf

Click on the links to go straight to further information from trusted online sources.

About this guide

It can be worrying and stressful for any parent or caregiver to see their child experiencing difficulties with their mental health. It's also hard knowing where to begin and who to trust when searching online for information and help.

That's why the MindForward Alliance Singapore – with support from our partner Asia Pacific Breweries Singapore – brought together social service agencies and mental health professionals to compile this guide.

A Parent's Guide to Mental Health in Children and Adolescents provides an overview of the key topics, signposts to further information from trusted sources, and includes insights from people who have been through or parented children with mental health struggles. This guide will help you:

- understand good mental health and mental health difficulties in children and youths
- be aware of why and when difficulties can arise and what to look out for
- know how to help your child if they are struggling
- know when and how to get specialist help
- understand that you need to look after yourself, too.

If your child is going through a mental health crisis and you need help now, skip to What to do if you are worried on page 27.

MindForward Alliance Singapore believes that businesses can play a key role in supporting working parents and caregivers, and be a positive influence on the mental health of our nation's workforce. We welcome the input to this guide from our members, who have shared some of their initiatives to support the psychological wellbeing of working parents while building a thriving career:

- **Asia Pacific Breweries Singapore**
- **HSBC**
- **Linklaters**
- **Standard Chartered Bank**

We are grateful to our contributors, who have donated their time and expertise to help us compile this toolkit, and check the information within it:

- **Caregivers Alliance Limited**
- **CHAT**
- **Institute of Mental Health**
- **KK Women's and Children's Hospital**
- **Limitless**
- **Mental ACT**
- **Myloh**
- **Samaritans of Singapore (SOS)**
- **SHINE Children and Youth Services**
- **Singapore Association for Mental Health (SAMH)**
- **The Private Practice**
- **Think Kids**
- **TOUCH Community Services**
- **Whispering Hope Singapore**

Sincere thanks to developmental psychologist Zsófia Szlamka, founder of AMKA Counselling, for oversight of the content.

About Asia Pacific Breweries Singapore – main contributing partner of this guide

As the largest brewer in Singapore, Asia Pacific Breweries Singapore sees an opportunity and a responsibility to use its business as a positive force for change.

As part of The HEINEKEN Company, its ambition is to raise the bar and go the extra mile to create positive social impact through initiatives that are integral to its business while realising the needs of the society and supporting the UN Sustainable Development Goals of achieving good health and wellbeing for the community.

A recent report by the World Health Organization stated that the pandemic triggered a 25% increase in prevalence of anxiety and depression worldwide[1]. Children, youths, and adults across the globe have had to cope with changes and challenges, and Singapore is no exception.

According to a study by the National University of Singapore together with the Ministry of Education and the Singapore Institute of Mental Health, around 1 in 3 children in Singapore have reported feelings of sadness, anxiety, and loneliness[2].

Asia Pacific Breweries Singapore recognises that the topic of mental health is coming to the forefront. Companies must take a holistic approach to promoting good health and wellbeing. More employees, especially working parents, are looking for work-life integration solutions to help them to better manage their caregiving responsibilities while accomplishing their career goals.

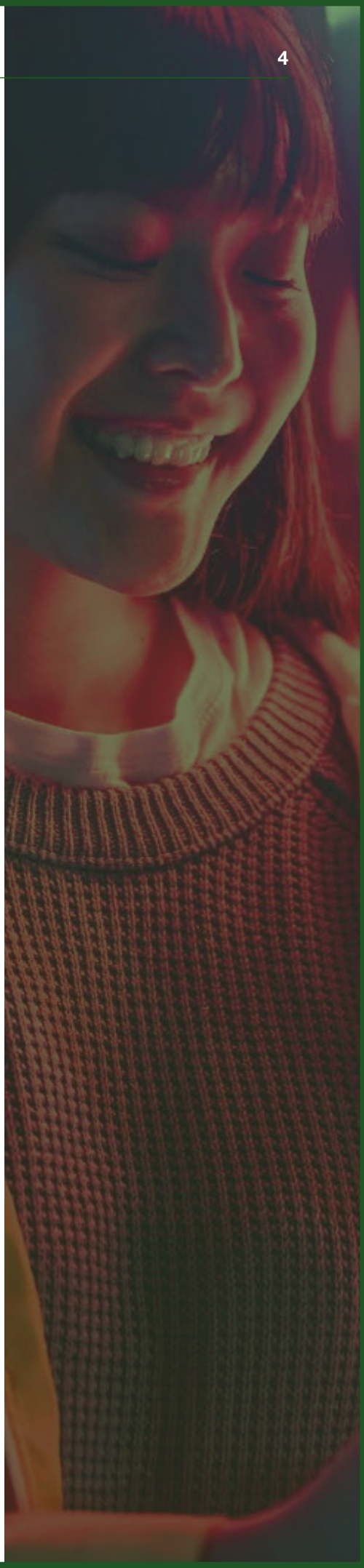
Through the partnership with MindForward Alliance, it looks to empower parents in the workforce with the support and resources that help them manage not only their own mental wellbeing, but also their children's. Asia Pacific Breweries Singapore also strives to work with MindForward Alliance to de-stigmatise mental health at work and create an inclusive and equitable society where people have the psychological safety to speak up about wellbeing, while fostering a sense of true togetherness and embracing enjoyment of life.

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[1] Mental health and COVID-19: early evidence of the pandemic's impact. https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Sci_Brief-Mental_health-2022.1

[2] Qing A. May 2022. About 1 in 3 young people in Singapore has mental health symptoms: Study. Straits Times. https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/about-1-in-3-youths-in-singapore-has-mental-health-symptoms-study



Mental health in children and youths

Mental health refers to the way we think, behave and feel. Like their physical health, our children's mental health can change over time. While some people are at greater risk of mental health difficulties - e.g. due to family history or socioeconomic disadvantage - they can affect any child or youth at any time. In most cases they can be overcome.

All children experience challenges in their lives that could pose a risk to their mental health. However, most children also have things in their life that balance out those risks and help them to bounce back from difficulty. These are called resilience factors. They could include a strong relationship with a trusted person, enjoyment of school, interest in sports or other extracurricular activities, good friendships, and having spiritual or religious faith.

Everyone has a unique combination of risk and resilience factors and, as parents, we can support our children to get into good mental health habits and build up their defences.

Nevertheless, we can't prevent our youth from struggling sometimes. That's why it's important to recognise the signs of mental health issues, to know how to support your child to cope, and identify when and how to seek extra help.

Globally, around 1 in 7 children and adolescents up to age 18 experience mental health disorders.[3]

In the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, global prevalence of anxiety and depression increased by 25%. Young adults were among the most affected.[4]

No parent wants to see their child struggling with any illness, and mental ill health can be really upsetting and frightening because it can make our loved one sad, fearful, angry or unpredictable.

If you're going through this right now, remember that:

1. **You and your child can get through this.** Many young people experience common mental health difficulties and recover. Modern therapies and treatments – if they need them – are proven to be effective.

2. **You are not alone.** Every situation is unique but right now there are thousands of families in Singapore with a child with mental health difficulties, and thousands more who have been there in the past. Reach out for support, whether it's from friends and family, charities or chatrooms.

[3] Polanczyk G V. et al. Annual research review: A meta-analysis of the worldwide prevalence of mental disorders in children and adolescents. *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry* 56.3 (2015): 345-365.

[4] World Health Organization, March 2022. Scientific brief: Mental health and COVID-19: early evidence of the pandemic's impact.

The developing brain

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Early years (0–5 years)

We are born with billions of brain cells – many more than we need.

To begin with, our brain cells are only loosely connected. As we interact with our environment in early life – for instance by playing with others, climbing, drawing and painting, being read to, feeling safe and loved – the brain cells that we use frequently develop stronger connections. The cells that aren't used are eventually discarded.

This 'pruning' is a normal process in early development as our brain – guided by our experiences and our genes – gets rid of the cells it doesn't need. This helps the brain become more efficient and ready to process complex information.

Research shows that persistent adversity in early life – such as ongoing abuse or neglect – can have a profound impact on the developing brain. However, we also know that many factors determine brain development and, with the right help, the impact of negative experiences can be reduced.[5]

ⓘ The Trauma Network for Children has free resources for children, teens, caregivers and professionals on coping with trauma.

A lot of brain development takes place in the first five years of life, but different parts of the brain develop at different rates. The prefrontal cortex (the part of our brain behind the forehead), which is involved in impulse control, among other functions, is not fully developed until age 25. That's why younger children need help to understand and manage strong feelings.

ⓘ Families for Life talks about how to help your pre-schooler learn about emotions.

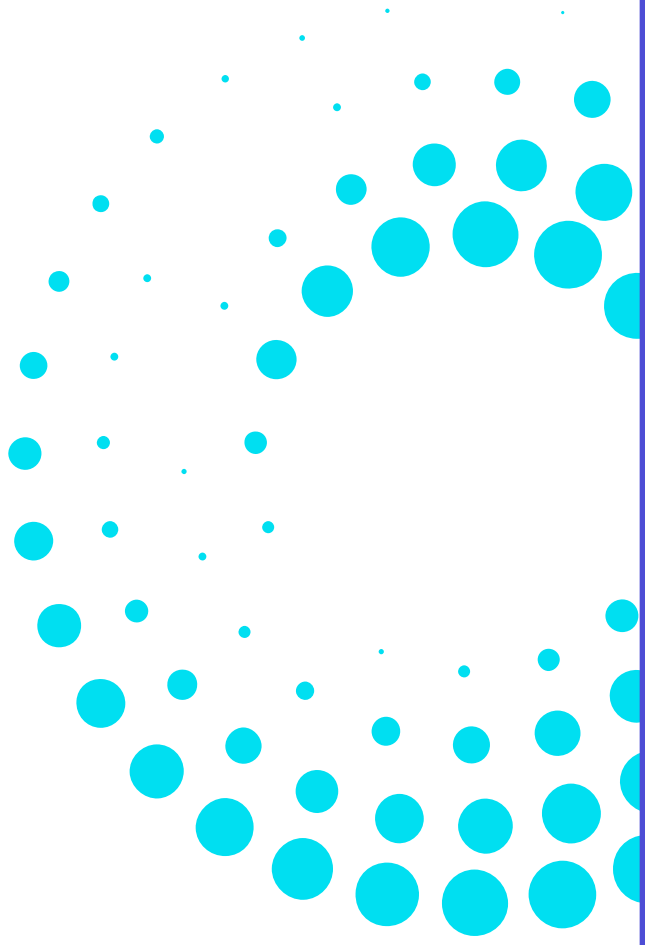
Mental health difficulties in young children

Common difficulties at this age can include developmental disabilities and delays, anxieties and phobias, issues with toileting, feeding or sleeping.

Some children may experience challenges with behaviour at school. This can lead to refusing to go to school or being excluded, withdrawing or not speaking, difficulties with friends and excessive worrying.

For some children, mental health difficulties resolve with time, while others may need more support. Global research suggests that half of all mental health conditions start by 14 years of age, but most go undetected until much later.

ⓘ The National Centre for Children and Families explains many of the difficulties seen in young children.



[5] J Bick and C Nelson 2016. Early Adverse Experiences and the Developing Brain. *Neuropsychopharmacology* 41(1) 177-196

Adolescence, teenage and beyond (12-20 years)

Apart from the early years, no other period of our lives comes with as many changes in the brain as our pre-teens and teens. This is also a time when hormones can mean adolescents experience different emotions and react to the changes they are feeling.

The adolescent and teenage brain is growing and changing rapidly. This is when unused cells in the thinking and processing part of the brain are pruned away and the remaining connections are strengthened.

The brain's emotional and reward system – when we experience feelings of pleasure in response to something we enjoy – becomes much more sensitive at this time. But the prefrontal cortex – responsible for decision-making, planning ahead, thinking about consequences and controlling impulses – is the last to develop.

All this change adds up to make teenagers more prone to taking risks and making impulsive decisions, as well as expressing more and stronger emotions.

ⓘ The Raising Children Network explains more on brain development in pre-teens and teenagers. (Australian site)

Skip to more information about specific mental health conditions.



Mental health difficulties in adolescents and teenagers

Adolescence comes with unprecedented changes for young people. These can lead to challenging behaviours - most of the time, temporarily. On occasion young people may develop behavioural disorders, such as conduct disorder.

Emotional disorders such as depression tend to emerge a little later.

Globally, depression, anxiety and behavioural disorders are among the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents.[6] Depression and anxiety are among common mental health problems – at least 1 in 4 people will experience them at least once in their life.

[6] World Health Organization (17 November 2021). Fact sheet. Adolescent mental health. https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health

Mental health awareness

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Healthy habits

A parent's first instinct is to protect their child from difficult feelings, but no-one can escape stress, risks, adversities and challenges altogether; they are part of life. Our role is to help our children build their coping skills, show them how we cope, help them learn how to talk about their feelings and ask for help if they need it.

The things we encourage and support our children to do to look after their bodies are also vital for their mental health. Eating well, exercising and getting enough sleep are key.

As parents, we can make a difference. TOUCH Community Services recommend using B.E.A.M to remember four parenting behaviours that can promote resilience in children:

B **Be present.** Put your phone down and focus fully on your child when you are doing things together. Give them regular time and attention, not just when they need soothing in distress.

E **Embrace imperfection**. Show your child that it's OK to make mistakes, and that we all do it.

A **Age-appropriate and healthy risk-taking.** Encourage your child to safely step out of their comfort zone, physically and emotionally. Encourage a growth mindset and show them that abilities can be developed over time.

M **Modelling emotional regulation.** Show your child that it's OK to have 'big' feelings and that it's possible to cope with and manage them.

ⓘ Find out more about BEAM on the TOUCH website.

Raising resilient children

Resilience is about being able to bounce back from difficulties. Building resilience is a life-long process and many aspects of our children's lives – their schooling, activities and interests, friendships – play a part, including their faith if they have one. A study led by the Institute of Mental Health showed that people with religion had greater coping skills and positive mental health.[7]

Role-modelling

Be emotionally 'honest', showing that vulnerability, stress and difficult emotions are part and parcel of life. This creates opportunities for your children to openly share how they're feeling. Show your children that it's important to look after yourself and normal to seek help when it's needed, and that this is not a sign of weakness.

ⓘ Singapore Association for Mental Health provides more information on role-modelling.

Communicating

Start the habit of talking about different feelings at home with your children. Check in on their feelings and allow them to be seen and heard. When tensions arise, be the one to initiate difficult conversations to keep the communication open and allow everyone to contribute. However, do respect your child's choice and privacy when they are not ready to share. Create a sense of emotional safety by offering your willingness and availability to listen whenever they are ready.

ⓘ UK charity YoungMinds has a downloadable list of conversation starters.

ⓘ Singapore Association for Mental Health provides more information on communication.

ⓘ The Ministry of Education has a parent kit with tips on how to re-connect with your teen.

[7] Vaingankar JA et al. 2021 Religious Affiliation in Relation to Positive Mental Health and Mental Disorders in a Multi-Ethnic Asian Population. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health.* 24;18(7):3368.

Social media use

Social media can have an impact on how we see ourselves – it is easy for youths to fall into the trap of comparing themselves to the seemingly perfect lives of others, and it can make them feel inadequate. In addition, FOMO (fear of missing out) is a modern social anxiety caused by knowing what your peers are doing 24/7. Talk to your youth about the importance of using social media in a responsible way and recognising how online content can make them feel.

ⓘ TOUCH has a resource about social media and self-esteem.

ⓘ Health Xchange has tips for parents on helping them to use social media safely.

STRESS: POSITIVE OR TOXIC?

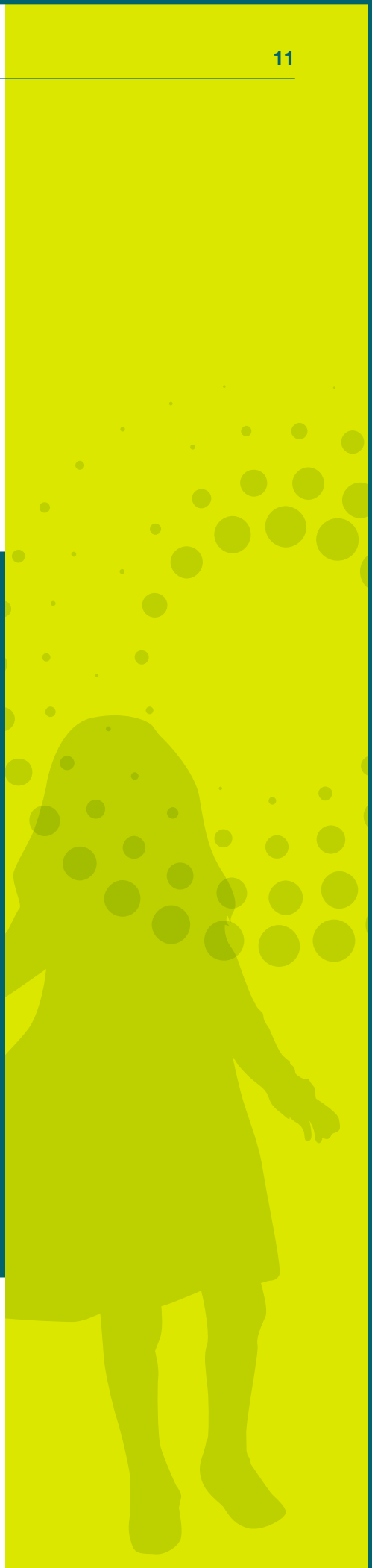
Stress caused by life's challenges can be a positive force. Facing day-to-day challenges pushes our children and youths to get things done, grow and become more resilient.

Less familiar challenges, with which they may need some help to manage, can cause greater but still manageable stress.

However, if our youths face challenges they can't deal with, or are experiencing bullying, abuse or facing tolerable stress over an extended period without support, they can experience toxic stress. This can lead to stress-related mental health difficulties such as burnout, depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), see page 30.

As parents and caregivers, it is our job to help our children cope with stress in healthy ways, by supporting them to find solutions, manage their emotions and take part in activities that they find stress-relieving. And if stress becomes toxic, we must help find the support our child needs.

ⓘ KK Women's and Children's Hospital has a free 'toolbox' with strategies for coping with stress.





Be emotionally 'honest', showing that vulnerability, stress and difficult emotions are part and parcel of life.

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Prevalent stressors

Any child can experience difficulties with their mental health at times, often coupled with distress. The triggers can often be identified as everyday experiences.

Change is a normal part of life, but it can be hard to cope with. Helping your child to understand the changes that are going on, and acknowledging the feelings they are having, can play an important part in helping them to get through their difficulties. Being their anchor – remaining calm, consistent and reliable – is especially important during times of change. Below are some of the common stressors that can trigger difficulties.

Divorce

Family break-up is often tough on children. Your child will need a lot of reassurance, stability wherever possible, and should not be made to feel they have to take sides.

ⓘ Family Assist from the Ministry of Social and Family Development has information about talking to and helping your child to cope during divorce.

ⓘ Youths talk about what helped them when their parents divorced, in this article on Channel News Asia.

Bereavement

You'll want to take your child's pain away, but when someone (or a pet) that they love has died it's important to allow them to grieve. Grief is a natural human reaction to loss, and not being allowed or able to process grief can lead to mental health difficulties.

ⓘ Whispering Hope Singapore has information on helping children through grief.

ⓘ Families for Life has an article on talking to kids about loss.

School transition

School is a big part of your child's life. Starting school, moving to a new school or moving up to the next grade level can be stressful. If going to school for the first time, your child may feel anxious about being away from you, and any child can worry about making friends, being in a new environment or meeting new teachers.

ⓘ ResiL!ence @ SHINE has a newsletter about coping with post-secondary school transitions.

ⓘ Think Kids supports children with special needs with school transitions.

ⓘ The Ministry of Education has information about preparing your child for the pre-school to primary transition…

ⓘ …and the primary to secondary transition.

Exam time

Preparing for exams is a particularly vulnerable time for students. Parents can provide much-needed support by affirming to their children that they are loved and valued regardless of their results.

ⓘ ResiL!ence @ SHINE has a newsletter for youths about setting and managing academic expectations in a healthy way.

ⓘ SCHOOLBAG the education news site has an article for parents about helping children to approach exams in the right spirit.

ⓘ The Ministry of Education has a parent kit on supporting your child during exam season.

Being bullied

When being bullied, children can feel helpless and find it hard to reach out. Take time to check-in regularly with your child to build your relationship and so they feel safe to open up. Allowing your child to role-play with you appropriate responses towards a bully can help.

ⓘ Help123 from TOUCH has advice on dealing with cyber bullies.

ⓘ ResiL!ence @ SHINE has a newsletter for youths on overcoming bullying.

Perfectionism

Perfectionism becomes unhealthy when a person's desire to give their best turns into a preoccupation with past mistakes and excessive fixation on predicting future errors. It can interfere with daily life and cause mental health difficulties.

ⓘ TOUCH has an article about unhealthy perfectionism.

ⓘ ClassDojo has a video series for primary-aged children about developing a growth mindset.

Friendship issues

Conflicts between friends can feel like the end of the world to youths. Allow them to express their thoughts about the friendship and reassure them that their feelings are valid. Ask how you can support them, which may include brainstorming with your child on the healthy ways to resolve conflict.

ⓘ SAMH has a useful resource about friendship issues

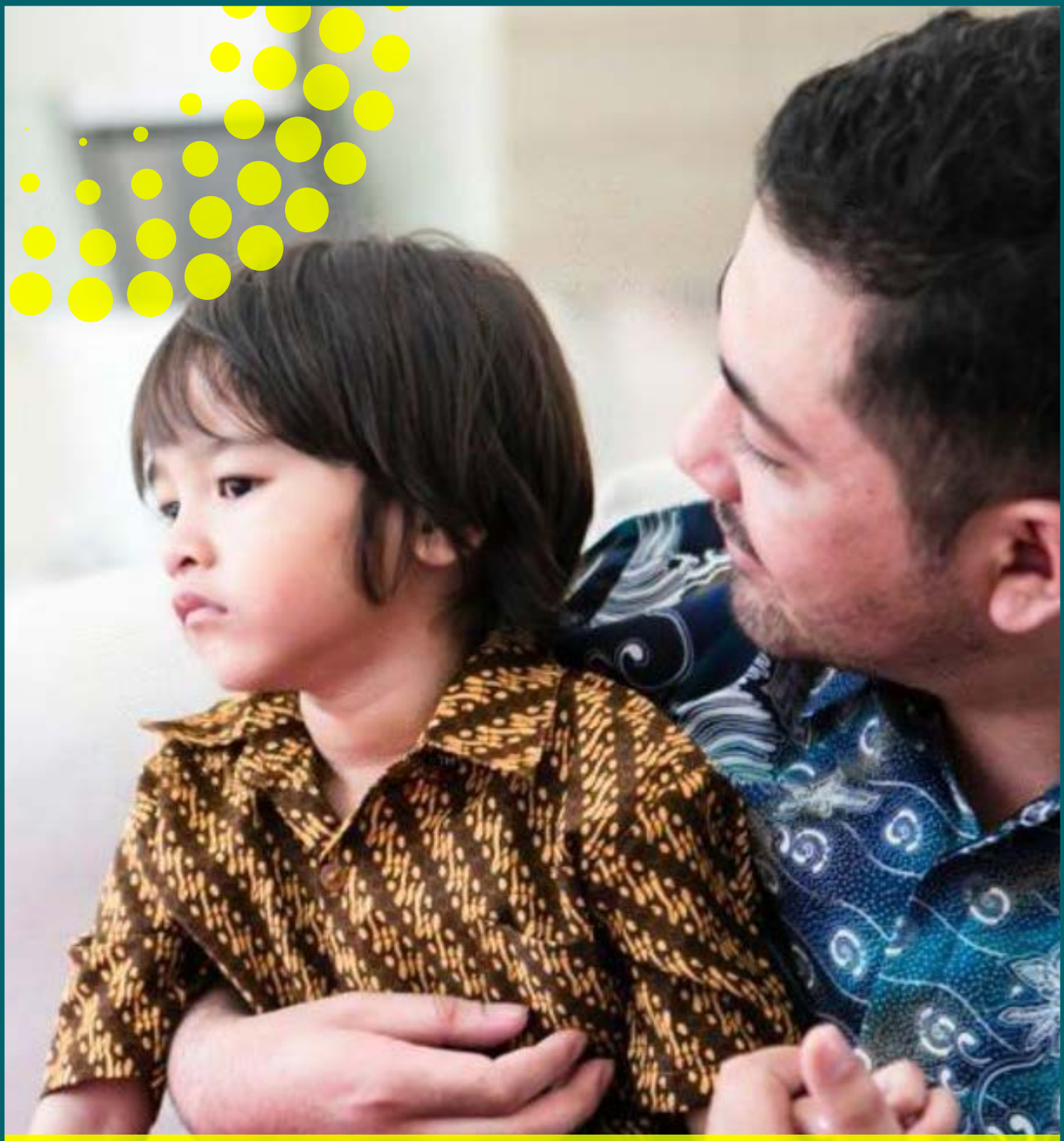
ⓘ ResiL!ence @ SHINE has a newsletter for youths on resolving friendship problems

Trauma

Trauma can stem from an event or events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by a person as physically or emotionally harmful. By understanding trauma, you can play a part in a child or youth's recovery.

ⓘ Limitless together with other organisations have developed resources about trauma and how you can help.





By understanding trauma, you can play a part in a child or youth's recovery.

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Feeling different

As children grow up, they learn about who they are and how they fit into the world. Feeling like they don't fit in can lead to real distress. Being teased, bullied or excluded for being different can make this distress a lot worse.

Ethnicity

Experiencing social exclusion and racial discrimination is distressing. This can lead to racial trauma, or race-based traumatic stress (RBTS): the mental and emotional distress caused by encounters with racial bias, ethnic discrimination and racism.

ⓘ Mental ACT provides counselling and programmes of support for South Asians in Singapore.

ⓘ The Singapore Indian Development Association (SINDA) is a Self Help Group for the Indian community in Singapore.

ⓘ Club HEAL provides counselling and programmes of support for Malay/Muslim clients.

ⓘ Sally Mama has a podcast in which a mother talks about raising a biracial child in Singapore.

Developmental disabilities

There are a range of conditions associated with differences in the way our brains work, which impact cognitive and motor functioning. These include Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD, Global Developmental Delay and learning disabilities such as dyslexia, dyspraxia and Tourette's syndrome.

Your child may have noticed their differences, and could benefit from better understanding themself, including their unique patterns of needs and strengths. Developmental differences can bring with them a greater risk of experiencing some mental health problems. A stable support system and early intervention can help.

ⓘ Think Kids provides interventions for people with learning differences as well as parental support.

ⓘ NeuroDivercity offers a wide range of resources for neurodiverse individuals.

LGBTQ+

Gender identity and sexual orientation take shape through childhood and adolescence. Children do not choose their sexual orientation and feeling that they are different can be confusing and scary. LGBTQ+ children and youths may also experience prejudice, discrimination and bullying due to social stigma. Some may also experience gender dysphoria: the distress when someone's assigned gender does not match their identity. These factors mean they may be more likely to experience difficulties with their mental health.

Journeying with your child to understand how they feel will help them establish strong foundations emotionally and psychologically to cope with challenges of sexual orientation and gender identity.

ⓘ Think Psychological Services offers LGBTQ+ counselling support.

Spotting the signs that your child is struggling

It is normal for a young person to feel angry, sad, worried or stressed sometimes. These feelings might be expressed in a range of behavioural, psychological and emotional ways, such as:

- negative thoughts, sadness, fear
- low self-esteem
- lack of concentration, confusion
- loss in motivation and interest
- arguing and fighting
- sleep problems
- change in appetite
- avoiding school and activities, withdrawing or being 'clingy'
- decline in academic performance
- overactivity
- wetting the bed, when previously dry at night
- falling ill frequently.

Stress can also cause or worsen physical health symptoms, in a process known as somatisation. For instance, your child may complain of tummy aches, chest pain and headaches. Seek advice from your doctor if you're unsure of the cause of physical symptoms.

ⓘ KK Women's and Children's Hospital has a video about somatisation.

ⓘ CHAT @ IMH has a free e-learning module on identifying signs of poor mental health in young people.

Difficult feelings, and the behaviours or symptoms they cause, often pass with time. It can sometimes be hard to know when difficult feelings go beyond that, but signs that are a cause for concern include:

- difficulties that last a long time
- persistent 'out of character' behaviour
- if your child is self-harming (see panel below)
- if your child is having suicidal thoughts (see page 20)
- if another child's safety is at risk
- difficulties that are interfering with a child's development
- if the situation is overwhelming for parents or carers.

You know your child, so you're well placed to recognise if their negative feelings or unhelpful thoughts are becoming overwhelming. At this point, you might need to seek some extra help.

Need help now? Go straight to What to do if you are worried, on page 27

ⓘ The Health Hub has a free online self-assessment for depression in anyone aged 12 and over.

Self-harm

To some youths, self-harm seems like a way of coping with problems, helping them express feelings that they may struggle to express otherwise, distract from other challenges that they may be facing, or release emotional pain.

It's often a temporary solution to a bigger problem. And while they may feel better afterwards, the issues remain, and the urge to hurt oneself might arise again; forming a habit or a cycle that can be difficult to break.

It's normal to be worried and upset if you discover your child is self-harming, but with care and support, they can recover.

Limitless has a guide for young people who may need support for self-harming, and parents who want to help.



"I started to notice that it was taking her a lot longer to get home from school. I eventually realised she was taking a different route to avoid people, and then it dawned on me that I never heard her chatting on her phone with friends like she used to – she was withdrawing."

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One parent's experience

The mother of a teen receiving treatment for an anxiety disorder tells us about the family's experience:

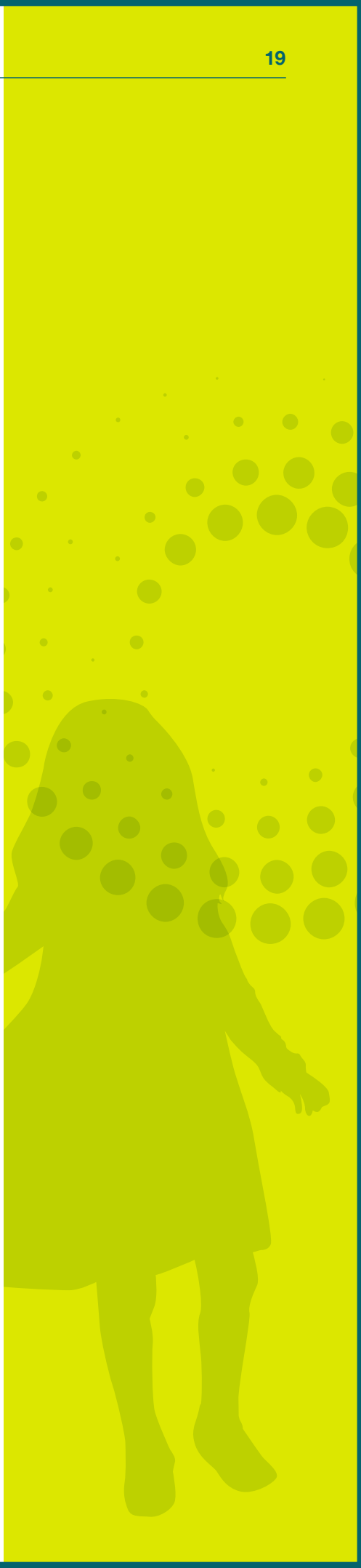
"We realise now that the very first symptom of our daughter's mental difficulties appeared when she was aged eight. She just said she couldn't sleep…we didn't pick up that there was wider anxiety, she was bubbly at school and socially, we didn't spot any signs.

"It wasn't until she was 12 that other behaviours manifested... I noticed more erratic sleeping, she would have very dramatic and sometimes violent outbursts, lots of arguments, extreme mood swings. But by the time she was 14, she had become very closed down.

"One Sunday we were having a heated discussion in the car on our way to a family lunch, and she told us she was self-harming. Behind all the behaviours, we knew there was someone in there who was confused and upset. My daughter was eventually diagnosed with anxiety and received talking therapy.

"My advice to other parents on the start of this journey is to recognise that there are boundaries to what you can do... I think that even if I'd had all the vocabulary and all the tools and training, as her mum, I still wouldn't be the person she would accept help from.

"It still feels precarious and fragile, but [with help] little by little our daughter – now aged 16 – has improved and is in a much better place than she was."



Suicidal thoughts

Some youths may have thoughts about suicide at some point – also known as suicidal ideation. Not all will go on to attempt suicide, but they do need help and support.

It's not always easy to know if your child is having suicidal thoughts. Many youths will keep it to themselves. However, spotting suicide risks early can make a big difference. While these won't apply to everyone, the following can be warning signs:

• **Verbal signs**

Direct statements such as "I am better off dead."

Indirect references such as:

"It will be better for everyone if I'm gone."

"I am a burden."

"I cannot take it anymore."

"I want to just disappear."

"What's the point, nobody cares."

• **Behavioural signs**

Giving away prized possessions.

Researching suicide methods.

Writing suicide notes.

Withdrawing from friends and family.

Self-harming.

Using drugs and alcohol to help them cope when they're struggling.

Changed sleep patterns.

• **Mood signs**

Displaying rage, irritability or outbursts.

Displaying unexplained calmness or happiness after seeming very distressed, due to a resolve to end their life.

Asking about suicidal thoughts

It can feel really difficult to raise the subject of suicidal thoughts with your child. But research shows that talking about it does not make it more likely to happen, and it may help them.

A young person who is thinking about suicide often feels very alone with their dark thoughts, so feeling like they're able to share their worries may help them feel less isolated.

Using the word 'suicide' yourself lets them know that it's okay to talk about it. Don't be afraid to ask directly whether they are thinking about suicide. Here are three ways you could ask:

"When you say you want to 'end it all', I am worried about you. Are you feeling suicidal?"

"Sometimes people going through similar stressful situations may think about suicide. Are you feeling suicidal?"

"I'm sorry if this sounds strange but I am concerned about you. Are you thinking about suicide?"

If the answer is 'yes'

If your child says that they are having suicidal thoughts, do not panic. The majority of people who have suicidal thoughts do not go on to make suicide attempts. However, your child needs support and here are some things you can do as part of this conversation:

Take their feelings seriously.

Reassure them that you're really glad they've told you and that you're there for them.

Don't try to fix or downplay their feelings – empathise with just how bad things are for them.

Check if they have made active preparations – if so, seek urgent help (see panel on the next page).

Ask if they have secretly attempted suicide in the past.

Think together about what's making them feel this way.

After the conversation, seek professional help (skip to What to do if you are worried, on page 27)

If your child doesn't want to talk to you, consider whether there is another trusted person they might talk to, and make sure they know there are organisations they can contact day or night (find these in the Appendix).

Take 20 minutes to learn how to spot suicide warning signs and have a conversation with someone you are worried about.

The biggest sign that someone is at risk of attempting suicide is if they have made plans, for example thinking about how, when or where they would do it, or researching methods online.

If you think your child is at immediate risk of harm, call emergency medical services at 995 or approach the A&E department of your nearest hospital.

If the situation is not immediately life-threatening you can contact SOS by writing to pat@sos.org.sg, or calling the 24-hour hotline at 1-767.



Stigma

Although mental health is discussed more than ever in global society, fear and a lack of understanding remain. Research shows that there is significant stigma associated with mental disorders in Singapore, with common assumptions about people being weak-not-sick, or dangerous and unpredictable.[8]

Being a parent is never easy, and it is made even harder when your child is suffering from a condition that is a subject of taboo or seen as a sign of weakness or source of shame. It is very common for parents and caregivers to blame themselves or to feel helpless or useless. But remember that thousands of families are going through similar challenges right now – you are not alone, and you can get through this.

The following advice for coming to terms with mental health difficulties in families, and combatting the stigma, is provided by mental health service provider The Private Practice.



Openness and communication

Many Asian-heritage parents adhere to an authoritarian parenting style. Authoritarian parents have strict — often unexplained — rules with no room for compromise, which create barriers to communication between parent and child.

By creating an environment at home that encourages sharing and discussion, it will help both parties to feel more comfortable and acknowledge their emotions surrounding mental health.

Education and understanding

The best way to start combating stigma around mental health is by learning more about it. Parents can learn, and educate other family members, to understand that mental illness is not an individual's fault.

It is important to exclude derogatory language and to talk about the importance of mental health on a par with physical health.

By understanding that people do not choose to be ill, as well as being sensitive towards people with mental health difficulties, we can begin to eradicate the stigma and shame associated with mental illness.

[8] Subramaniam M. et al (2017). Stigma towards people with mental disorders and its components – a perspective from multi-ethnic Singapore. *Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences* 26, 371-382.

Taking Action

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MindForward Alliance
Singapore

How to speak to your child if they're struggling

When you know your child is struggling with their feelings, talking to them about it can be hard. You might not know where to start or when is the best time.

Try to avoid conversations at the height of distress. Reassure your child that you love them and are there for them right now, but wait for a calmer time to talk about the cause. When you initiate a conversation, ensure that you're in a place in which they feel safe, without the fear of punishment, and try to use vocabulary that they understand and use themselves.

ⓘ Focus on the Family Singapore has conversation tips for discussing mental health with your child.

SHINE and The Private Practice, have provided some tips to help you have an effective conversation about difficult feelings:

Validate their emotions: encouragements to "cheer up" or "don't' worry" can feel dismissive. Acknowledge the strength of their feelings, even if you don't understand them yet.

Show that you believe them: how a person appears does not always reflect how they feel and people with depression and anxiety often try hard to hide it. Avoid statements like "but you don't look sad!".

Avoid clichés: try not to reach for platitudes like "this too shall pass" or "let it go". Instead help your child remain in the present and think about what they are capable of doing now.

Exhibit 'active listening': pay attention to your child and show that you are doing so. Have good eye contact and an open posture (e.g. unfolded arms), indicate you are listening with nods, an occasional open-ended question (e.g. "what do you mean when you say…?") or comment to recap what has been said (e.g. "Sounds like you are saying…").

Talking to an anxious child

There is no single solution for dealing with children's anxiety. However, here are some research-based techniques from The Private Practice that can help day-to-day:

FEEL

During periods of anxiety, it's hard for a child to think clearly and logically, or even remember how to complete basic tasks. Instead of trying to reassure the worry away, try the FEEL method:

F **Freeze** – pause and take some deep breaths with your child to help reverse the nervous system response.

E **Empathise** – anxiety is scary. Your child wants to know that you get it.

E **Evaluate** – once you and your child are calm, it's time to figure out possible solutions.

L **Let go of your guilt** - you are an amazing parent giving your child the tools to manage their worry.

Allow them to worry

Allowing your children to worry openly, in moderation, may be beneficial. You could give 10 or 15 minutes to daily 'Worry Time' journaling, when they write down all their fears.

From what if, to what is

Anxiety is a form of mental time travel to assess potential threats – the 'what if'. Returning to the present moment – the 'what is' – can help to ease feelings of anxiousness. Mindfulness exercises are one excellent way to shift a child's focus from what if to what is. A simple mindfulness exercise is to help your youngster to focus on their breath for a few minutes.



Engaging through activity

Sometimes talking while doing an activity together can feel less pressured and intense. Doing something physical can also help to release feelings of anxiety and promote a sense of wellbeing.

ⓘ The Spruce has an A to Z of ideas for things to do with younger children.

ⓘ Sassy Mama has compiled a list of 101 kids' activities in Singapore, including free things.

ⓘ The Ministry of Education has a parent kit on ways to re-connect with your teen, including activities.

MindForward Alliance
Singapore

One young person's experience

Hello, I'm Jamie.

In 2016, when I was 15, I was diagnosed with mental health issues that I'd been struggling with for a while. My journey to recovery was challenging, and even now I'm still learning every day. You can hear more about my story as a Myloh overcomer on YouTube.

This is my guide to supporting a teen with mental health difficulties, based on my own experiences as a teenager going through depression and anxiety. Your support is really important in your child's recovery, and one day I hope you will reap the benefits of the effort you're putting in for your child by seeing them healthy and well.

DOs

Active listening: this means not to interrupt your child and put aside everything you're doing – your phone, your work, etc – as your child wants 100% of your attention.

Encourage: rather than comparing to the child's past achievements or comparing to their peers, validate their achievements, as small as they may seem, such as taking their medication or going to therapy.

Patience: it can be difficult when your child shuts you out and refuses to see you or talk to you. There are times when your child needs space. There are times where trust is needed even though they broke promises not to harm themselves. You can be encouraged that they are willing to try again.

Apologise: no one is always right and that includes parents. This is a new experience for all parties and there are times where there will be disputes. Your teen will trust you more when you can admit your mistakes.

Self care: you will be worried and tense if your child is struggling. But know that they can read the room and they'll likely mimic your emotions subconsciously. As such, by taking turns to care for your child and getting the respite you need, you can be more emotionally ready to support your child.

DON'Ts

Give advice/compare: It comes as an instinct to want to relate to what your child is going through but never tell them "I went through this before" or "You can try this". I hope you can see that your child is trying their best in their own way. Instead, validate their emotions and experiences as everybody's road to recovery is different.

React on instinct: your teen will do things that make situations tense, but try not to react based on your agitated emotions. Let them know you need some space to cool down – this will enable you to think of better ways to handle the situation.

Deny or pressure treatment: treatment is vital but it is only beneficial if your child is ready and wants the help. Do not force them to do something they aren't ready for as it can backfire. Instead of insisting, try to understand their reasons and explain your rationale. Hopefully you can reach a compromise.

Invade privacy: I cannot emphasise this enough. As much as a parent worries for a child, understand your child is still growing and developing. They are at the stage where they may be relying more on their peers than family. Know that by giving them privacy, they believe you trust them and it allows for more open communication.



What to do if you are worried

If you are worried about your child's mental health, reach out for some extra help. Getting support early can be very beneficial, so don't wait until the situation has escalated. There are many different services available that may be a good fit for you and your child.

If you are in a crisis

A mental health emergency is as serious as a physical one. If your child is at immediate risk of harm, call emergency medical services at 995 or approach the A&E department of your nearest hospital.

If your child is safe but may be at risk of suicide or is contemplating suicide, make a referral to SOS by writing to pat@sos.org.sg, or calling the 24-hour hotline at 1-767.

If you're concerned, and need help

It is understandable if you want to rush in and do what you think needs doing to rescue your child. However, this can disempower them and exacerbate their difficulties. The decision to get professional help can be intimidating and scary for your child, so it's important to talk to them about seeking help before you do it.

Even if they're not ready to talk to anyone else, you can still reach out for advice and support. It can be helpful to tell your child that you are doing this, particularly for teenagers.

Once you have made the decision, there are so many resources out there it can be hard to know what's best suited to your situation.

ResiL!ence @ SHINE recommend using Stubby the Squid or Belle, the Beyond the Label helpbot to find the right services:

ⓘ Stubby the Squid is a Telegram chatbot created by a youth-led initiative in Singapore, which can guide children and youths through a series of questions to help them and you find suitable organisations who can help.

ⓘ Belle, the Beyond the Label helpbot seeks to help anyone overwhelmed with stress or anxiety to find help.

Talk to your child's school or learning institute. They may already have some concerns and it is important for them to know what's going on. They might also be able to provide someone - such as a school counsellor - to provide regular emotional care and check-ins during the school day.

Go to the Appendix page 42 for sources of professional support.

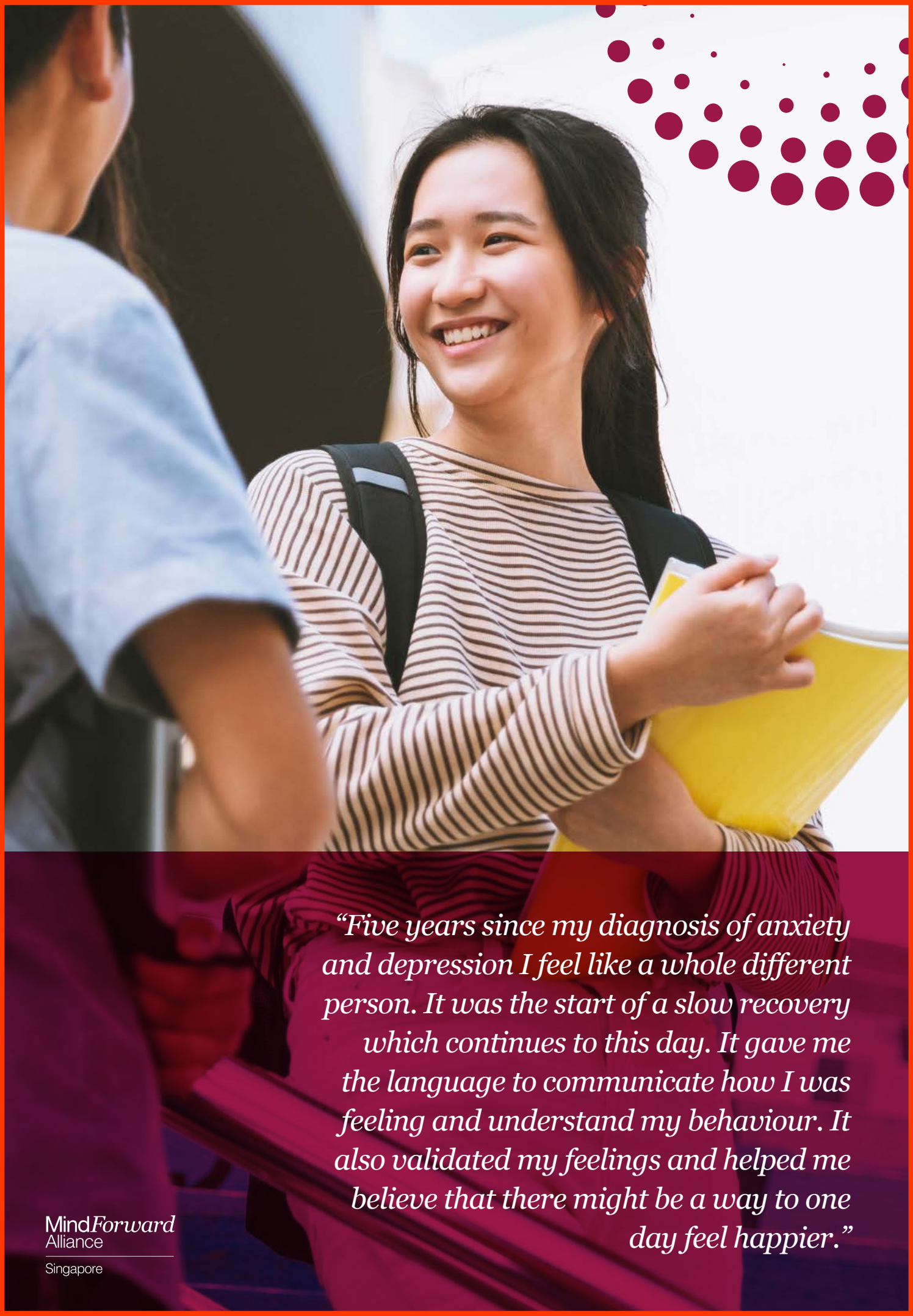
Psychological first aid

If the situation is manageable but your child requires urgent care, you can administer psychological first aid (PFA), using 'Look, Listen, Link'.

Look – keep a lookout and be aware if your child is in distress. The act of offering support lets them know they are not unnoticed and alone.

Listen – listen to their needs, concerns and priorities, reflect what is being shared. If it's too tough for them to talk right now, give them space.

Link – connect them with support from loved ones or professionals, and to relevant resources online.



"Five years since my diagnosis of anxiety and depression I feel like a whole different person. It was the start of a slow recovery which continues to this day. It gave me the language to communicate how I was feeling and understand my behaviour. It also validated my feelings and helped me believe that there might be a way to one day feel happier."

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Conditions & Treatments



MindForward Alliance
Singapore

Common mental health conditions

Here we outline some of the mental health difficulties often seen in children and young people, and signpost further information.

Addiction

Addiction is when a person has no control over whether they use something - such as drugs, alcohol, gaming or social media - and they have become physically or psychologically dependent on it to the point that it affects daily life.

Substance abuse means using a drug or alcohol excessively but does not necessarily mean the person is addicted. However, addiction can begin as abuse.

ⓘ The National Addictions Management Service has more information about getting help for addiction.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

ADHD is caused by differences in brain function. People with ADHD can seem restless, may have trouble concentrating and may act on impulse.

Symptoms of ADHD tend to be noticed at an early age; most cases are diagnosed between 6 and 12 years. The symptoms of ADHD usually improve with age but can continue to cause challenges in adulthood. People with ADHD may also have additional problems, such as sleep and anxiety disorders.

ⓘ The National University Hospital and Institute of Mental Health has a guide to parenting a child with ADHD.

Anxiety

Anxiety disorder is unrealistic or irrational fear that causes significant distress to the point it affects daily functioning. It primes our fight or flight response and can take the form of multiple symptoms, depending on the type of anxiety.

There are several types of anxiety disorder, including:

- **Generalised anxiety disorder** (GAD) is chronic and exaggerated worry and tension, even when there is little or nothing to provoke it.
- **Panic disorder** brings unexpected and repeated episodes of panic attacks (intense fear accompanied by physical symptoms such as palpitations and chest pain).
- **Social phobia**, or social anxiety disorder, which is characterised by overwhelming anxiety and excessive self-consciousness in everyday social situations.

ⓘ CHAT has information on these and more types of anxiety disorder, and ways to help manage anxiety.

ⓘ This Straits Times article includes personal accounts of 'reopening anxiety' as the pandemic restrictions lifted.

Bipolar disorder

Bipolar disorder causes people to experience periods of extremely high (manic) or low (depressive) mood - lasting days or even weeks. In youths, bipolar disorder can impact sleep, energy levels, behaviour, thinking and relationships. It is more likely to be diagnosed in later teenage years or young adulthood.

ⓘ National University Hospital has more information about bipolar disorder.

ⓘ CHAT has information on bipolar and other mood disorders.

Burnout

Burnout results from chronic stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterised by being tired and drained most of the time, easily frustrated and having a negative outlook. Youths may express a sense of failure and helplessness. They may fall sick more frequently and isolate themselves from others.

ⓘ The Asian Parent has an article about burnout.

ⓘ HelpGuide has tips on avoiding and recovering from burnout.

Depression

Depression is a mood disorder that causes persistent feelings of sadness and loss of interest. it affects how you feel, think and behave and can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems.

Contrary to common belief, people cannot simply 'snap out of' the condition and stop feeling sad. There are numerous contributing factors such as stressful life events and chemical imbalances in the brain. Early interventions such as counselling, therapy and/or medications can help individuals recover.

ⓘ CHAT has information on depression and other mood disorders.

ⓘ Limitless has an article about depression and a visual novel about a day in the life of a youth struggling with it.

Eating disorders

The two most common types of eating disorders are Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia Nervosa. A person with an eating disorder either eats much more or much less than is needed. They often experience having a distorted perception of their body image. This may involve having negative feelings about their body shape, and feeling dissatisfied or discontent about it.

The onset of eating disorders is usually during adolescence or early adulthood. Both groups may engage in behaviours such as dieting, excessive exercise, self-induced vomiting and using of laxatives or other medications to manage their weight.

ⓘ CHAT has more information about eating disorders and practical tips for managing them.

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)

OCD has two main components to it: obsessions and compulsions. Obsessions are repeated, intrusive, unwanted thoughts or images that cause huge distress. To make oneself feel better, the individual engages in compulsions – they feel compelled to repeatedly perform certain actions or mental acts in a particular fashion. These can impact daily life, especially if the compulsions are time-consuming and not directly linked to what they were intended to prevent.

ⓘ CHAT has more information about OCD and practical tips on managing it.

Personality disorders

A person may receive a diagnosis of personality disorder if they experience significant difficulties in how they relate to themselves and others, and have problems coping day to day. It's uncommon for a person to be diagnosed with a personality disorder until young adulthood, because at younger ages personalities are still evolving. However, indicators of personality disorder may begin to surface and can cause challenges.

ⓘ Institute of Mental Health outlines specific types of personality disorders.

ⓘ Think Psychological Services provides support for people with personality disorders.

Psychosis

Psychosis is when a person has delusions and/or hallucinations. Delusions are false but firm beliefs that are not shared by others of the same cultural background. Hallucinations are experiences of seeing/hearing things that are not rooted in reality even though it feels real to them. Their thoughts tend to be disorganised and when talking, they may jump from one unrelated topic to another etc.

The onset of psychosis is in late adolescence to early adulthood. Some people might experience an isolated psychotic episode due to a stressful event, illness or drug use. However, others can experience regular episodes of varying time lengths, with this being linked to disorders like schizophrenia.

ⓘ CHAT has more information about psychosis.

ⓘ The Child Mind Institute has an article on signs of psychosis in teens (US site).

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

PTSD happens when someone is exposed to a life-threatening event either by directly experiencing or witnessing it, or having repeated exposure to details of the event. They may experience flashbacks, nightmares, mood changes and avoid places and people that remind them of the event. They may also become easily startled or reactive.

ⓘ CHAT has more information about PTSD and practical tips for managing it.

Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a type of psychosis characterised by the presence of delusions, hallucinations or disorganised thoughts for at least 6 months. It can have a significant impact on a person's life, for instance they may be unable to look after basic needs such as washing.

ⓘ CHAT has more information about psychosis and schizophrenia, and practical tips on managing them.

Recovery from mental health conditions

Getting better can mean different things to different people. With support, many young people will be able to make a full clinical recovery, where they no longer have mental health symptoms. Others may achieve good personal recovery, according to what is important to them as individuals. This could be something like feeling in control of their emotions, thinking more positively and having hope for the future, or being able to achieve something that they find difficult, such as going to school.

ⓘ SAMH offers mental health rehabilitation services for youths.

ⓘ Read more about personal recovery from UK charity Rethink Mental Illness.

Treatments and therapies

If your child has been referred to a mental health service – or you have self-referred – the specialists there will carry out an assessment. The results of the assessment and recommendations will be discussed with you and your child, so you can agree a care plan together.

It is important that you maintain an open, positive and collaborative relationship with your child's therapists and doctors, to ensure the best outcomes.

Therapy

Many treatments for common mental health issues involve a person talking to a trained therapist about their difficulties. There are different forms of talking therapy tailored to the patient's needs and situations, but all involve talking to better understand one's feelings and identify ways to move forward.

Talking therapies are typically conducted over 12–16 weekly sessions with a clinical psychologist in a clinic setting – they may be one-to-one, in a group or involve the whole family, depending on the issue. It is important to complete a full course of therapy, so you and your child must be fully committed to it. It can take weeks or months to see an improvement.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is the most common technique used in children. CBT supports a youth to look at how they can manage their thoughts, feelings and behaviours, and how changing the way they think can help them feel better.

ⓘ The Institute of Mental Health provides a list of many kinds of therapy that may be offered.

Other forms of therapy and support

There is a range of alternative programmes available that can benefit the wellbeing of young people with mental health difficulties. There are several social service agencies with youth mental health expertise operating in the community. For example, Singapore Association for Mental Health (SAMH) offers the following:

Youth mentoring – this focuses on the development of each youth's unique potential, while empowering and engaging them by providing the opportunity to give back to the community.

Creative group work – providing a safe space for youths to express themselves through sports, arts, music and movement. They learn healthy coping strategies for stress and form good support systems for themselves among the group.

Art therapy – does not require a mental illness diagnosis and the emphasis is on self-discovery journey, creation process and the therapeutic relationships between the individual and the therapist. This service is offered by SAMH Creative Hub.

Every mainstream school in Singapore has a school counsellor who can provide support to a child in distress. Counselling usually involves weekly sessions to help your child think about their situation. This is ideal for youths who are generally well but need help coping with a current crisis.

Parents and families can also access support from counsellors and social workers based in family service centres and social service agencies.

Medication

Talking therapies work well, especially in mild conditions. However psychiatric medications (known as psychotropics) may be helpful in young patients with moderate-to-severe illness, particularly for certain conditions such as severe depression, anxiety or psychosis.

The decision to start medication should be made jointly between the young person, parents, adult caregivers and doctors, and they should be combined with appropriate talking therapies, psychoeducation, family work and/or liaison with schools.

The Institute of Mental Health has more information about psychiatric medicines.

Therapy scepticism

Some people question why someone would discuss their feelings with a stranger when you could just talk to a loved one. While good communication with the people we care about is important, they aren't always capable of bearing our troubles. They are usually untrained in what to say and how to react when someone has mental health difficulties and, since they know us, it can be difficult for them to separate their own emotions from the conversation.

Inpatient treatment

Most children and youths who need treatment or therapy will live at home as normal and attend regular appointments with their mental health specialists. This is called 'outpatient' or 'community' care. If a young person needs intensive mental health support, or is at risk of serious harm to themselves or others, they may benefit from a period of observation and management in a hospital. Usually this is voluntary and happens with the agreement of the child or young person and their caregivers. However, the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) Act can be used to admit the young person without their consent if the risk of harm is so high that their doctors think admission is essential.

In Singapore, formalised admissions of this kind can only take place in the Institute of Mental Health.

The average length of stay in a child and adolescent psychiatric ward is approximately 10–14 days. Some cases could be discharged much earlier once their crises or acute stressors get resolved. The young person is taken care of by a multi-disciplinary team of mental health professionals comprising psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, medical social workers, occupational therapists and psychiatric nurses.



Talking therapies work well, however medications may be helpful in moderate-to-severe illness, especially depression, anxiety or psychosis.

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Self-care

Parenting a child who's going through a tough time is incredibly demanding. You'll have times when you feel completely drained. Don't feel guilty about this, or about getting frustrated sometimes – it's totally understandable because these situations can be really challenging.

It's important to protect your own mental health and put enough back 'in the tank' to give your child what they need. Self-care is the practice of looking after your own health. It is a proactive process where you take ownership and responsibility for your own wellbeing. Sometimes it can feel hard to carve out time for you, but self-care is not something to be done only when convenient.

Here are some tips from the Caregivers Alliance about how to make your self-care a priority.

Recognise the importance of keeping yourself healthy

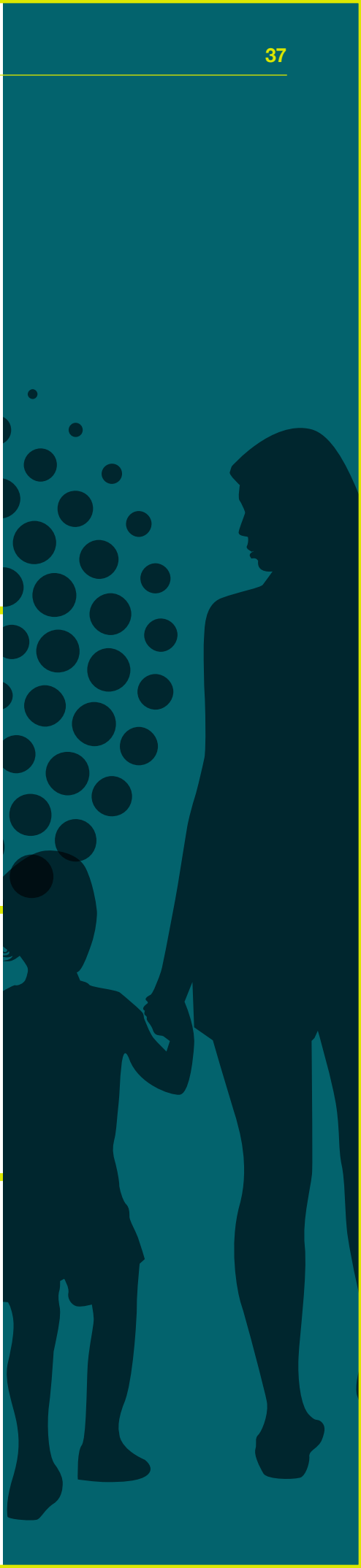
Acknowledge your health is as important as the child you are caring for. Be mindful in making healthy lifestyle choices such as making time to be physically active such taking walks and eating well. Avoid unhealthy lifestyle habits such as smoking, excessive alcohol consumption or reliance on prescription medication as an outlet for relief. Be a role model for your child in self-love so that you can continue to care for them in the long run.

Manage your stress reactions

Become aware of your own threshold for stress as caring for a child in recovery from mental health issues can be exhausting. Recognise and address signs of excessive stress in your life such as irritability, high anxiety, unusual sleep patterns and feeling of frustration, guilt, and depression. Pause to evaluate what are the main causes of the stress and take steps to address them.

Take steps towards setting SMART goals for yourself

When you are aware of the root causes of your stress you can assess each as to whether you can either do something about it, or accept it. For those you can change, set SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely – goals to address them. Taking ownership of your problem-solving through setting goals will allow you to see the benefits of your plans.



Stay socially connected and seek support when needed

Avoid isolating yourself from others especially when you find the mental health recovery journey with your child gets challenging. Keep in touch with people especially your support system, be it family or friends, through social media such as WhatsApp or even planned meet-up sessions. Perhaps confide in your colleagues or employer or even engage the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) hotline that could be available to you.

Be willing to ask for emotional support such as a listening ear or even practical help such as running errands like grocery shopping from your network of support. Know that others may not be able to support you in the ways that you want all the time but asking different people may result in more assistance being provided, to maintain your own mental wellness.

"It's like the analogy of putting your own oxygen mask on first in an aeroplane. You do need to make sure you're in a good place to be able to support your child. I got some help – counselling – and found it incredibly helpful to talk to someone that wasn't emotionally invested in the situation."

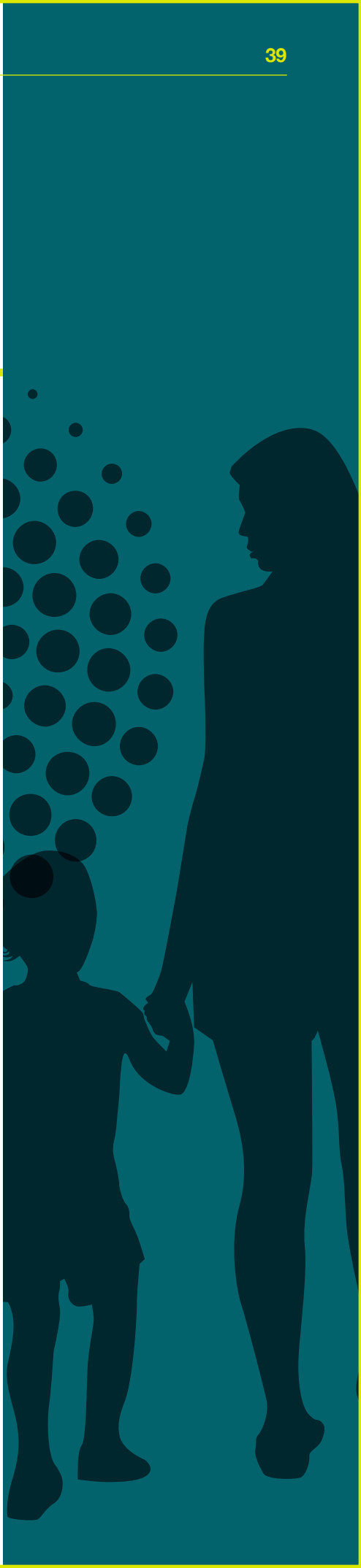
Caregivers of family members with mental health conditions share their stories in a video from Caregivers Alliance.



Employee support schemes

To be a good employer, businesses should provide additional and appropriate support for employees going through tough times, for instance when parenting a child with a mental health difficulty.

Here, we share stories of ways in which four members of the MindForward Alliance Singapore support working parents.



Asia Pacific Breweries Singapore

Asia Pacific Breweries Singapore has strengthened its support for employees by partnering with Asia's largest mental health care company, Intellect, to provide personalised care for its people. Employees get free 24/7 access to comprehensive mental health support, coaching and self-help programmes.

They also introduced a series of initiatives that provide employees, especially working parents, with greater flexibility to meet the demands of their personal lives while maintaining high levels of work performance. Alongside the implementation of flexi work policies, practical changes included:

- no meetings on Friday afternoons
- no weekend emails
- no meetings during lunch
- effective meetings – attendance capped at 15

Shaun Ee, People Director of Asia Pacific Breweries Singapore said:

"The 'home fronts' of employees are as, if not more, important than their 'work fronts', and adopting wellness solutions, enhancing our employee benefits, and supporting their mental health and emotional wellbeing needs with Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in mind enables us to attract and retain the very best talents and ultimately, be a great place to work."

HSBC

In 2021, HSBC Singapore launched their Future of Work plan in which they committed to a more flexible and hybrid way of working, to help colleagues thrive at work and in their personal lives. This model is working well for many HSBC colleagues, especially those who are parents and/or the primary caregivers to someone at home. The bank also has an online Global Wellbeing Hub, containing resources related to mental, physical and financial wellbeing, for employees to access from home or at work. The aim is to help their people, including working parents, improve their quality of life while achieving optimal business performance.

Their Balance Employee Resource Group works closely with HR to advocate for a healthy and conducive work environment through influencing policies and procedures – some examples are cited above.

Rachael, a mum of 5-year-old twins, says her career in HR benefitted from HSBC's supportive culture: *"The bank's hybrid work approach has been immensely helpful for me as a working mum, allowing me to better manage work and home demands. I'm proud to work for HSBC as it is a place that is progressive and serious about my career and personal development – being a mum has never been a show-stopper for my career here."*

Linklaters

Adrian Fisher, Partner, Head of TMT – Asia at Linklaters talks about the firm's recently formed Family and Carers Network:

"During the Covid period, we recognised a desire for our colleagues dealing with a variety of family issues to come together to speak and share ideas and stories, and so established a Family and Carers Network in our Singapore office.

"Having always found it to be a delicate balance between my role as a husband and a dad to my three children and being a busy lawyer in a high-pressure professional environment, I put my hand up to be the partner sponsoring the initiative.

"The network kicked off with an Asia region-wide webinar on working parents, including speakers with both younger and older children. It was a fantastic event with a lot of interesting discussion and questions for our panellists, showing that our colleagues want to have these discussions and are facing a range of issues for which the network can be a source of support.

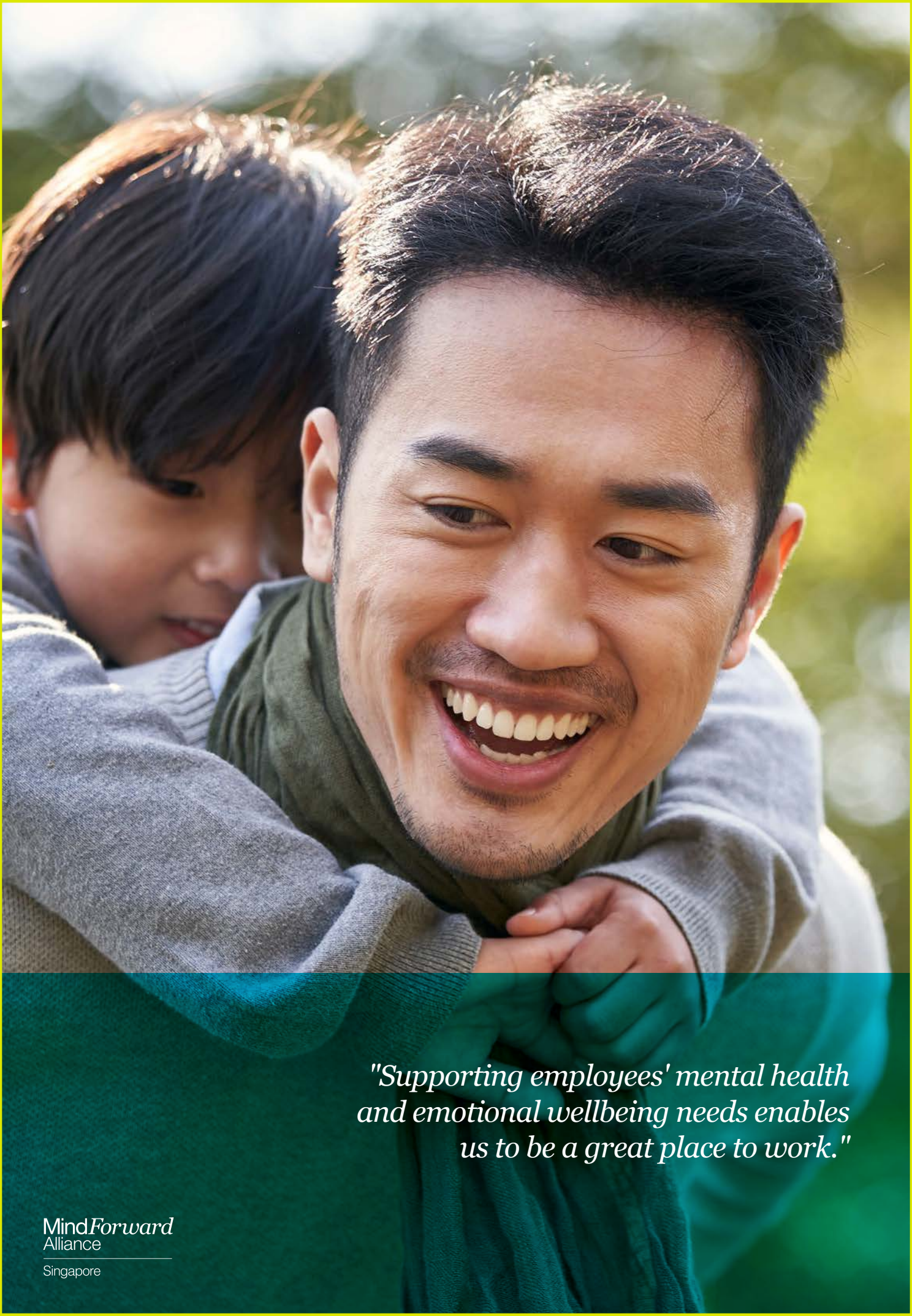
"By having a group like this we can help our people navigate some of the difficult family issues that come up when you work in a professional environment and allow people to get support so that they can get the most out of both their family and work lives."

Standard Chartered

Standard Chartered recognises that becoming a parent is a major life-altering responsibility and the experiences of transitioning back into work differs amongst colleagues. Their 6 month Made for Parents Buddy Programme aims to provide a safe space for informal exchange of information for parents returning to the workplace from parental leave. New parents are partnered with a Buddy – an experienced parent who can lend their perspective and share tips for a smooth transition back to work.

One employee – a dad of 15-month-old twins – who joined the programme said: *"I found the experience very useful. My Buddy was able to guide me on what sort of things I might experience and how to handle them. He was also able to answer any questions I might have.*

"As a new parent you are bombarded with often contradictory information telling you what to do or not to do. It was invaluable having the insights and support of someone who had been through it all before. I was able to learn from their experiences and use them as a sounding board for whatever challenges I faced and explore different ways to approach them."



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Sources of support for your child

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Helplines

Limitless has social workers and therapists on call to support young people between 12 and 25 years. Monday to Friday 9am–7pm. Complete the form on their website for a call back.

Samaritans of Singapore (SOS) is open 24/7 to provide emotional support to those in crisis. Call 1-767

Singapore Association for Mental Health (SAMH) toll-free helpline provides information and help. Monday to Friday 9am–6pm. Call 01800 283 7019

The Institute Mental Health (IMH) Mental Health Helpline is a 24-hour hotline if you are facing a mental health crisis. Call 6389 2222

Tinkle Friend Helpline from Singapore Children's Society provides support, advice and information to lonely and distressed children aged 7–12 years. Monday to Friday 2.30pm–7pm. Call 1800 2744 788

TOUCHline (Counselling) provides emotional support and practical advice for ages 12–25 years. Monday to Friday 9am to 6pm. Call 1800 377 2252

Textlines/chatlines

CareText from Samaritans of Singapore (SOS) provides emotional support for those in distress 24/7 via WhatsApp 9151 1767.

ec2.sg from Fei Yue has a free one-to-one online chat service called Quick Chat, for ages 12–25 years to talk about their mental health or emotional concerns. Monday, Thursday and Friday 10am–12pm, 2pm–5pm (excluding public holidays).

HEAR4U from CARE Singapore is a Whatsapp messaging service is a space to seek advice and express your concerns on emotional and mental issues. Monday to Friday 10am–5pm. Whatsapp 6978 2728

OTR Listens is an online chat service for anyone who needs an empathetic listening ear. Monday to Friday 4pm–12 midnight, Saturday and Sunday 12 noon–12 midnight.

Tinkle Friend Online chat from Singapore Children's Society provides support, advice and information to lonely and distressed children aged 7–12 years. Monday to Friday 2.30pm–7pm.

WebCHAT from CHAT is an online chat platform for young people to get in-the-moment support from mental health professionals for their emotional concerns. Tuesday to Saturday 1pm–8pm (excluding public holidays).



MindForward Alliance
Singapore

mindforwardalliance.org.sg

LinkedIn:
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MindForward Alliance Singapore thanks the organisations who helped to compile this resource:

MindForward Alliance Singapore

We are a non-profit membership organisation, dedicated to transforming workplace culture into one that supports the mental health of its employees. MindForward Alliance Singapore is one of seven country chapters in the global MindForward Alliance, which works with businesses to drive improvements in the way they support the mental health and wellbeing of their employees. The Alliance convenes business leaders and HR practitioners to collaborate and share knowledge.

We believe that when organisations work together towards a common goal, better, more sustainable mental health outcomes will be achieved for more people, sooner.

Partners

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Contributors

caregivers alliance limited | CHAT Young People's Minds Matter | Institute of Mental Health National Healthcare Group | KK Women's and Children's Hospital SingHealth | LIMITLESS | Mental A.C.T Advocate . Care . Train | myloh | REACH | SOS Samaritans of Singapore | SHINE Children & Youth Services | Samh Singapore Association for Mental Health | The Private Practice | think kids Kid's Intervention & Developmental Services | TOUCH Community Services | wh sg

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