

## how to balance

# screen time

### (for a healthy headspace)

The internet has changed the way we work, socialise and relax, with a lot of these activities now happening online. It has added a lot of value to our lives.

Gaming can be a positive and enjoyable pastime. It can help us connect with others, feel socially included and improve our self-esteem. Healthy gaming can bring structure and routine into our lives and give us some beneficial downtime, relaxation and fun.

The research is unclear how much screen time is too much. What is clear however, is that it is important to keep a healthy balance of online and offline activities in our lives.

Not all screen time is the same. Screens and devices have become essential for us to do our work, and can be excellent learning devices. We can use them to connect with others, get support, master new skills, relax and have fun. Some online activities help us learn and be productive, whilst others provide downtime and enjoyment. However, there are other online activities that are less productive or maybe unhealthy, for example distressing violent games or if the content you are watching is not making you feel good. So not all screen time is equally valuable.

#### Signs that your screen time is becoming unhealthy

It is important to think about the impact that your screen time is having on your life in each of these areas below.

- **Exercise:** Research has linked screen time with an increased amount of sedentary behaviour in children and teens, and we know that being active is good for our physical and mental health. Are you still making time to move? Play sport or be more active?
- **Sleep:** is VERY important. If you are gaming when you would normally be sleeping you might need to turn off a little earlier or move your device out of your bedroom. Most young people need between 8 and 10 hours of sleep per night to be at their best, both physically and mentally.
- **Social time:** Being connected to others helps us feel good. We can connect with others online but it is important to see people we care about too. Are you making time to regularly meet up with friends and family?
- **Variety of activities:** are you keeping up with your school tasks and work? Are you doing a variety of other activities that you enjoy like reading, music or other hobbies? Do you make time to stop and eat well? Don't let other activities slip off the radar, they are important for you too.
- **Conflict, irritability and stress:** if you are getting into conflict with others about your gaming or are feeling irritable, sad or tense when you game or can't game, it might be time to think about the balance of screen time in your day.
- **Money:** are you spending more money than you can afford on new games or in-game purchases? This can become a problem for some people too.

## Supporting yourself and getting help

The amount of time you spend on your screen can sneak up without you realising it. What can you do if your screen time has gotten out of balance?



Get other activities done first before you relax online. For example do some exercise, get your homework and chores done, walk the dog and spend time with your family before turning on your device. Treat it as a reward.



Decide in advance how much time you want to spend online, then set a timer to help you stay within that time limit.



Schedule in some 'no screen times' during your day. Set up times to 'unplug'.



Make mealtimes screen free.



Make sure you have offline hobbies and interests that you enjoy regularly, like seeing friends or playing sport.



Exercise while you game, by getting up and moving regularly. Doing some simple stretches can really help.



Work out how much sleep you are getting? Sleep should be a priority, as it is important for our physical and mental health.



Charge your devices outside of your room or perhaps don't have them in your bedroom at all. It will reduce the temptation to be online instead of sleeping.

If you find that your relationships, mood, school performance or work are being impacted by your continued or increased gaming use, then it might be useful to talk with someone you trust like a parent, teacher, school counsellor, family member or friend. A general practitioner (GP) is another good place to start when seeking help and information. You can also contact **headspace**, your local **headspace** centre, or Kids Help Line if you wanted to talk to somebody about your internet and gaming use.



**With the right support, most people are able to get back to enjoying the benefits that gaming and internet use can contribute to their lives.**



### Where can I get help

If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from [headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au), your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider.



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# **understanding gaming**

**A guide for family and friends**

- The information in this fact sheet is designed to help you better understand your young person's gaming and internet use and how you can support them to maintain a healthy balance in their lives.
- Most young people spend time online and gaming, and they are usually positive pastimes. However, a very small number of young people can experience problems in their daily lives as a result of their gaming and internet use.
- Over engagement in gaming can also be a symptom that other things in a young person's life might not be going so well.
- It can often be hard for parents to know the difference between healthy and unhealthy internet use and to understand when a problematic pattern of use might be emerging.
- Parents need to look after themselves and know where to get information and support when they need it too.

## Healthy gaming

Games are an integral part of human behaviour. It is normal and healthy for young people to engage in play as a part of their daily lives, including playing games online.

Online communities are providing more opportunities to feel socially connected and gaming can help young people feel a sense of belonging. At healthy levels, gaming can increase self-esteem and social acceptance. It can also provide an opportunity for a structured daily routine and can be a fun and relaxing activity.

However, any behaviour, when taken to extreme, can have a negative impact on a young person's everyday life.

### When should I be concerned about my young person's gaming?

Gaming can have both positive and negative outcomes, like most activities. If you're concerned about a young person's gaming, it's important to consider a variety of factors.

This guide can help you understand more about your young person's mental health and how to connect with them about their gaming use, so that together you can make more informed choices to support their wellbeing.

### What are the warning signs that a young person might be experiencing mental health issues?

Whilst too much gaming or internet use may be an indicator that something isn't quite right, there are usually other signs that a young person might be experiencing a mental health issue. Often it can be hard to know the difference between normal behaviour, such as occasional moodiness and irritability, and an emerging mental health issue.

Feeling down, tense, angry, anxious or moody are all normal emotions, but when these feelings persist for long periods (some weeks) of time, and if they begin to interfere with daily life, they may be cause for concern.

### Keep an eye out for significant changes in your young person that last longer than you might expect (at least a few weeks), such as:

- being less interested and involved in activities they would normally enjoy
- changes in appetite or sleeping patterns
- being easily irritated or angry
- their performance at school, TAFE, university or work is not as good as it once was
- involving themselves in risky behaviour they would usually avoid, such as taking drugs or drinking too much alcohol
- difficulties with concentration or motivation
- seeming unusually stressed or worried, or feeling down or crying for no apparent reason
- expressing negative, distressing or out-of-character thoughts.

Good mental health allows people to deal with the changes and challenges life throws at them and live their lives in a positive and meaningful way. You can help your young person think about the balance they have in their daily life and increase their participation in activities that support their wellbeing. Just like physical fitness, mental fitness takes regular effort too.

You can read our fact sheet on "What is healthy gaming" for more information on the signs of troublesome gaming or internet use. For ideas on how to support the mental health of your young person, visit our "Tips for a healthy headspace for family and friends".

### How long should I let my young person play video games for?

Currently we don't have definitive evidence about how long young people should engage in playing games. As a rule, if a behaviour is having a negative impact on the young person's life then it's a problem. The Australian Physical Activity & Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines (published by the Australian Department of Health) suggest that screen time should be limited to no more than two hours per day for 12-17 year olds. This generally doesn't include purposeful screen time (activities that are interactive like work or school and in some cases gaming).

It's also important to consider whether gaming or internet use is impacting on other areas of a young person's life. Healthy behaviour relates to a young person engaging in a variety of activities and contexts (such as family time, friend time, alone time, and inside and outside activities). There are also certain activities that support a young person's health and wellbeing, such as exercise and good quality sleep.

If the length of a young person's gaming or internet use is stopping them from consistently engaging in a variety of other activities, affecting their sleep, hygiene or healthy eating, or being used as a way of avoiding necessary tasks (like school work or studying), it may be a problem.

## Leading by example and setting boundaries as a family

Young people model their behaviours by observing the adults in their life, so setting an example with your own screen time is a good place to start. Talk with your young person about the importance of “screen-free time” (including gaming) and negotiate times when screen time is and isn’t appropriate.

### As a general rule the following are good boundaries to set around screen time:



Limit screens in bedrooms and turn them off for at least one hour before bedtime, as the light and stimulation from screens can disrupt falling asleep and sleeping well. Instead encourage activities like reading, journaling or drawing at these times. If reading on e-devices make sure ‘night modes’ are available and used.



Get up and move regularly. Doing simple stretches can really help with back neck and wrist issues. Think about your setup.



Limit screens at meal times and when eating. This allows us to be more mindful eaters and encourages valuable family time



Screen time should not prevent a young person from participating in activities they need and want to do. If gaming, internet use or screen time are impacting on these activities, consider scheduling in time for them prior to gaming.

## I'm a parent trying to understand gaming and my young person's gaming use. What can I do to support my young person?

It can be intimidating and confusing trying to understand your young person’s gaming and online experiences. Sometimes these can feel distant and disconnected from a parent’s world. Importantly, you don’t have to be an expert or even play the game, however, to help build and maintain a connection. Respecting the interest the young person has, and trying to understand what it is the young person gets from the experience will go a long way.

As a parent or carer it can be helpful to share some screen time with your young person, or to spend time understanding what they are experiencing online and when gaming.

### Take some time to understand the gaming experience:

- the reasons your young person likes the game
- what they get from the experience
- do they see difficulties in the way the game is played
- what they do when the game doesn’t go well.
- who they are playing with and the kinds of interactions they have.

### And the structure of the game:

- the rules
- the playing environment (and whether it is online or offline)
- the nature of the game
- the language/terminology used in the game
- the format (teams or solo, pausable or real time etc...).

Ask your young person to explain the rules and have them demonstrate the game. You can also get them to show you an online playthrough or stream, or even watch an esports match together. This will help you identify any concerns and have constructive conversations with your young person about their gaming use.

## How to have a conversation if you are concerned

Raising sensitive issues with young people can be challenging but there are things you can do to make it easier for everyone. It’s important that young people feel comfortable and supported to talk about what’s impacting their health and wellbeing. You can encourage them by:

- managing your own feelings. Often young people are worried about their parents being upset, anxious, overwhelmed, shocked, angry, blaming, etc.
- letting them know at the start of the conversation that you intend to be calm and supportive no matter what they say
- being available without being intrusive
- spending regular time with them – even doing one activity a week together can help to keep the lines of communication open
- showing that you are interested in what’s happening in their life and trying not to focus on things that you think may be a problem.

There is no perfect way to start a conversation about mental health with a young person. It can be helpful to:

- let them know that you love them. They may not always admit it but this is likely to be very important to them
- keep trying (without nagging – it can be a tricky balance) to keep communication open with your young person. Sometimes a bit of perseverance goes a long way.
- if a young person knows you are coming from a caring place and that you are trying to be genuinely helpful, it allows for more engaging conversations
- take their feelings seriously – show empathy, listen carefully and don’t judge. Let them know you understand that they enjoy their gaming and internet use. It can be more useful at times to say nothing than to jump in with answers or solutions
- think about a good time and place to talk about sensitive subjects. For example, would they find it easier to talk while driving or going for a walk? Would they prefer to be out of the house with no interruptions? Would they prefer to have someone else there for support? It is always better to have these conversations when people are not distressed or rushed, but are feeling calm and safe
- let them know that you are concerned in a non-confrontational way
- remind them that talking about a problem can help
- acknowledge that opening up about personal thoughts and feelings can be hard and sometimes scary
- reassure them that you will be there for them and ask what they need from you (they might not know what they need)
- tell them that you are glad they are talking to you.

It can be helpful to begin with general and open-ended questions such as the examples below.

- 'How is [e.g., school/sport/gaming] going?'
- 'How are you getting on with [e.g., your friends/your siblings]?'
- 'How are you feeling about [e.g., studying/exams]?'

To focus on more specific thoughts and feelings, try using 'I/you' statements such as:

- 'I'm happy to talk or listen and see if I can help'
- 'I'm here for you, and we can work it out together.'
- 'It's OK if you don't want to talk to me, you could talk to [trusted/known adult]. I will keep letting you know I love you and that I'm here for you.'

Remember, a supportive family can make a big difference to how well a young person copes with challenges in their lives. If you would like more support or information you can go to [headspace.org.au](https://headspace.org.au) or contact a support service.

### Looking after yourself is important too

When you look after yourself you have greater patience and can offer a more considered approach to supporting your young person. It is important to remember your own needs and know where to get information and support when you need it.

Here are some ways you can look after your own health and wellbeing:



Remind yourself that there is no such thing as a perfect parent, we each try to do our best everyday



You don't have to play or be an expert in gaming but learning a bit about this will help you connect and relate to your young person. There are lots of video 'walk throughs' and 'how to's' that can help with this



Eat well and drink plenty of water



Get a good night's sleep



Make time every day to do something you enjoy (this might even be gaming with your family and friends)



Ask for help or support for yourself from family and friends, or your GP or counsellor.

One of the most effective ways to support a healthy headspace is to model healthy behaviours yourself.

You can also take a look at our family and friends section on the headspace website: [headspace.org.au/friends-and-family/](https://headspace.org.au/friends-and-family/) or our eheadspace group chats at [ehheadspace.org.au](https://headspace.org.au) for more information.

### What useful services are there?

As well as headspace centres and eheadspace, there are other services that can help:

- parent helplines (in every State and Territory of Australia) – Google 'Parentline' along with your State or Territory
- Relationships Australia: [relationships.org.au/](https://relationships.org.au/)
- family relationships services: [familyrelationships.gov.au/Services/FRC/Pages/default.aspx](https://familyrelationships.gov.au/Services/FRC/Pages/default.aspx)
- local family support services.

If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from [headspace.org.au](https://headspace.org.au), your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider.



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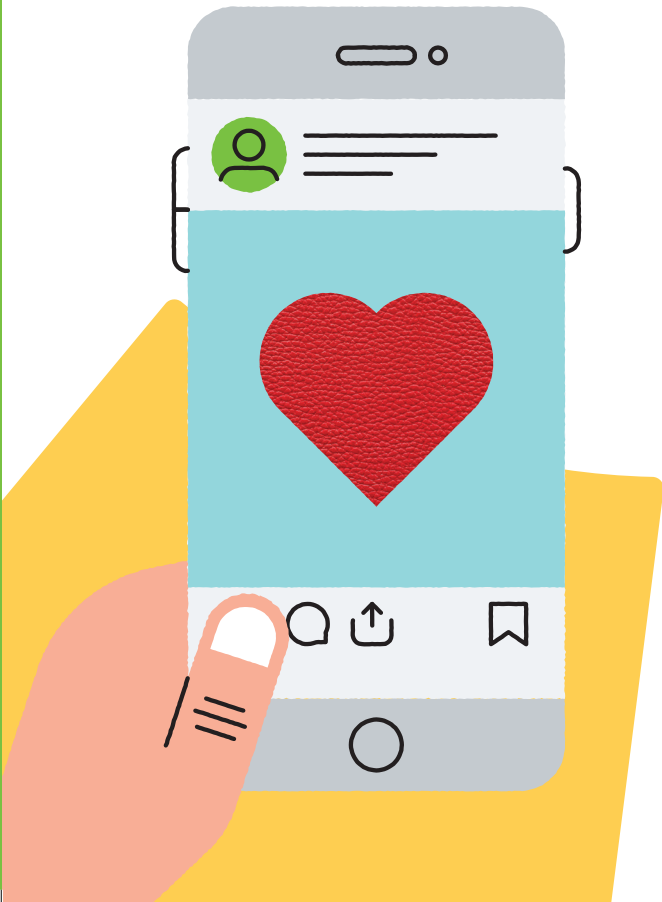
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**headspace**

National Youth Mental Health Foundation

# what is ehheadspace?



# **headspace** supports young people aged 12 to 25 years who are going through a tough time.

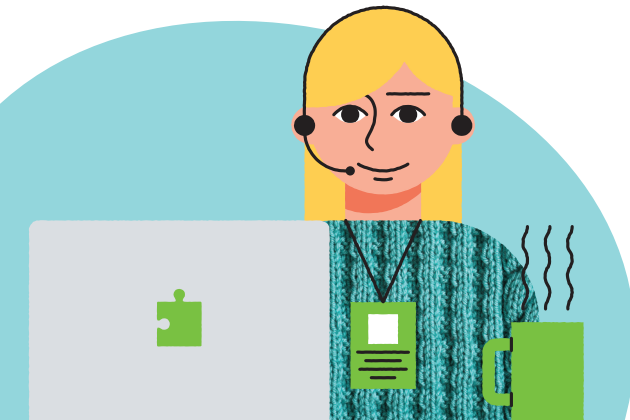
We provide eheadspace for young people who might be too far from a centre, might not feel comfortable with face-to-face support - or just prefer this way of chatting.

It's a safe place and it's free\*. You might use eheadspace if you need advice, if you're feeling isolated or worried, are unsure of what help you need or just want to talk things through. We want you to get the help you need sooner rather than later.

## **Who is eheadspace?**

At eheadspace, we are experienced youth mental health professionals – psychologists, social workers, mental health nurses and occupational therapists. We help by listening, talking things through, giving you information and offering other support options to help you. You can also get support from our family and friend specialists.

**eheadspace web chat and telephone support is available 7 days a week, 9am – 1am Australian Eastern Standard Time (AEST), but you can email anytime.**







## How do I register?

Head to **eheadspace.org.au** to get started. The same information will be asked if you contact by phone (**1800 650 890**) but don't worry, you won't need to provide a full name, we just ask for an email address.

## What information do you need?

The more information you feel comfortable providing us, the more we can help. Some helpful information to share would be how you've been feeling, if you've had any mental health issues before, whether you are already using a support service and if you have any concerns or don't understand any part of the session. Feel free to let us know what you want from us and what can we help with.

## Different ways to chat

We'll always do our best to get to everyone, but at times eheadspace can get really busy. If you can't access web chat when you log on, another option may be to send an email or contact us on **1800 650 890**. You can even email us to book a time to chat.

Group chats are another way for you to ask professionals some questions in a anonymous online environment. These sessions are held online once a month, each based on a specific topic. If you are unable to attend on the night, you can go into the headspace website and view past chats online.

**Head to [eheadspace.org.au](https://eheadspace.org.au) to discover tools and articles you may find helpful.**

\*All eheadspace online services are free but if you call **1800 650 890** from a mobile phone normal call charges apply.



## You can access eheadspace anywhere in Australia via:

Web chat at [eheadspace.org.au](https://eheadspace.org.au)

Calling us on **1800 650 890**

Emailing us by visiting [eheadspace.org.au](https://eheadspace.org.au)

**eheadspace web chat and telephone support is available 7 days a week, 9am – 1am Australian Eastern Standard Time (AEST), but you can email anytime.**



## Is it an emergency?

If you are in an emergency situation or need immediate assistance, contact mental health services or emergency services on **000**. If you need to speak to someone urgently, call Kids HelpLine **1800 55 1800** or Lifeline **13 11 14**.

## how to deal with a

# relationship break-up

### Dealing with relationship break-ups

Relationships begin and end all the time. It's a normal life experience and it doesn't mean you won't be close to someone again. A relationship break-up can be tough no matter what the situation. Everyone feels different when they're going through a break-up. It's OK to feel sad, angry or let down – lots of people do.

Sometimes you need to prioritise looking after yourself and there are things that you can do to make it easier to handle. Things like hanging out with friends, eating healthily and making sure you sleep well.



**It's OK to feel sad after a break-up and it can take time to get over the loss of a relationship**

After a break-up many people experience a range of feelings, like sadness, anger or guilt – which may lead to feeling rejected, confused or lonely. You might even feel relief, which can be just as confusing.

Some feel as though their world has turned upside down and that things will never be good again. Many feel restless, lose their appetite and have less motivation or energy to do things. It might be tempting to try and move on quickly – but it takes time, work and support.

### Actions to help you after a break-up

- Give yourself some space. It might be helpful to try to have some space from the person for a while after the break-up – this can mean online, too.
- Keep busy. You might find yourself with too much free time on your hands, especially on weekends. Plan ahead and do things that you usually enjoy.
- Talk to friends and family and others who can support you. It's OK to want some time to yourself but hanging out with supportive people can help get your mind off things, and get a different perspective.
- Take time out for you. Do things that you find relaxing, like watching a movie, playing or listening to music, meditating, reading or playing sport.
- Try not to use alcohol and other drugs to deal. While they might help you feel better at first, the after-effects will leave you feeling much worse.
- Give it time. Allow yourself time to cope with the change.
- Try to get regular sleep and exercise.

## Advice from our headspace clinicians

- It may take some time to get over. Recognise there will always be good moments and bad moments, which will turn into good days and bad days. Whatever you're feeling now won't last forever.
- If you ended a relationship it doesn't necessarily make the breakup decision any easier.
- If someone broke up with you, it doesn't mean anything is wrong with you.
- Many people feel upset or angry during this time. Always make sure you express your feelings in a safe way – for yourself and others.
- It's better to be single than in a bad relationship. Remember – you don't need a partner to feel happy.
- Try not to worry about how the situation will look to others. Now is the time to focus on your own self-care.
- A break-up is an opportunity to learn more about yourself and what you want in future relationships. Working on yourself is the best way to be in a position to have a good relationship.
- With time and support you can pull through a relationship break-up and come out as a stronger and more resilient person.

## How to break up with someone

Be considerate about how you end a relationship. Always think about how you would want to be treated in the same situation.

Try to end things in a way that respects the other person, but be honest. Be clear and tell the other person why the relationship is over. Understand that the other person might be hurt and possibly angry about your decision.

Try to end the relationship in person, rather than by text or online.

## When your ex moves on

It can be really upsetting if you find out that your ex has a new relationship. Try to avoid thinking about them being with someone else. Don't contact or post about your ex and lash out at them, because this won't make you feel any better.

If you're feeling angry or jealous when getting over a difficult break-up, it's important to remember to stay safe. Get help and talk about it with someone you trust.

## Thinking about a new relationship?

It can help to take some time out before beginning another relationship. Think about what you want in your next relationship, such as having more independence or being more honest with the other person.

Remember that being in a relationship won't necessarily make you feel happier. Getting more confident and comfortable about being single is also a healthy step.

## When to get some help

Break-ups can feel like the end of the world, but most people work through them in time and without any serious problems. Sometimes a break-up can lead to someone experiencing other problems, such as depression. These feelings can affect your daily life and stop you from doing the things you enjoy. If it's been longer than two weeks, it's time to take action.

If you feel unsafe in any way, or you're struggling to move on (for example, if you're feeling jealous or angry, or notice yourself constantly checking their online activity), it's important to talk things through with someone you trust. This may be a friend or family member. Your general practitioner (GP), a counsellor, or someone at your local **headspace** centre can also provide you with confidential support.



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# understanding depression

(it's more than sadness)

Many people feel sad after they have gone through stressful or difficult times. This could be a relationship break-up, trouble with family or friends, changing schools or exam times. It's normal to feel down from time to time, and it can actually help you to figure out what's important to you.



**The word 'depression' is often used when people are talking about moments when they're feeling sad or down. However, depression and feeling depressed is more than 'feeling sad'.**

Different people will experience depression in different ways. It usually includes these signs and symptoms for a period of at least 2 weeks.

## Signs and symptoms

### Changes to your feelings or emotions

Like feeling unhappy, numb, empty, irritable, guilty or like everything is too hard.

### Changes to your thoughts

Like having negative thoughts, struggling to concentrate, or having thoughts of self harm or suicide.

### Physical changes

Like feeling tired most of the time, difficulty sleeping, changes in appetite or unexplained aches or pains.

### Behaviour changes

Like withdrawing from family or friends, not getting things done or using more alcohol and other drugs.

There's no simple answer to why depression happens. For some, it can be a combination of challenging life events or issues. These might include things like prolonged stress, traumatic relationships, discrimination, bullying or social isolation.

Other things that have been linked to depression are things like decreased sleep, increased alcohol and other drug use, lack of exercise and poor diet. For others, it might be connected to a family history, or other individual coping style factors. But sometimes there's no clear reason and that's OK, too.

It's important to address depression early before it starts having a bigger impact on your life.

## What can I do?

People experiencing depression can and do get better.

A part of depression means it can feel hard to find the energy or motivation to make some changes. Sometimes it might feel like nothing will help. That's why recovery is often made easier when someone has support from people around them, including family, friends, school and community groups.

It can help to start with one thing you know you can do, then slowly add things in step by step. This can help you feel like you're making progress.

## 1 Take care of yourself

Looking after our minds and bodies can help us with our general mental health and wellbeing. You can:

- eat well to improve your mood, energy levels and general health and wellbeing
- sleep well to help your brain and body rest
- get moving to help you sleep better, manage stress and boost your mood
- avoid, or at least limit your use of, alcohol and other drugs.

## 2 Notice your thinking patterns

Being aware of our thoughts and feelings is an important step toward improving how we feel. Taking notes on this can help you to figure out which thoughts make you feel better or worse. Keeping a journal can help you to understand this more.

## 3 Talk about your thoughts and feelings

It's a good idea to talk to someone you trust about your thoughts and feelings. Talking to others can help you feel understood and may help you see things from a different point of view. You might:

- talk to your family or friends, a teacher or coach, your mob or Elders
- get support from online communities or resources
- connect with others and be part of a group, like a sporting club or religious group, to manage feelings of loneliness.

## 4 Get into life

Sometimes it can be difficult to think of enjoyable things when you're feeling low. It might take some extra effort, but try to do something that you used to enjoy, even if you don't feel like it. This can be very helpful in lifting your mood. Try to notice any changes in how you feel before and after these activities.

Learning new skills can also help boost your confidence and give you a feeling of achievement.

## 5 Try some relaxation strategies

Practicing relaxation techniques can help you manage stress and help ground you during the tough times. It can help ease heavy emotions. There are lots of websites and apps that can help you with this – just google 'meditation apps'.


## The link between depression, suicide and self harm

Some young people who experience depression also self harm or experience thoughts of suicide. Self harm and thoughts about suicide are often ways of trying to cope with difficult emotions.

If you have thoughts of suicide or self harm it's really important to talk to someone you trust, such as a family member, friend, an Elder or teacher. Or get professional support.

### How do I get help?

For some people, using the tips on this fact sheet will be enough to help manage symptoms of depression, but if you experience these symptoms most of the time, for longer than two weeks – it's time to reach out for support.

 **An important part of professional support is talking (psychological) therapy. This can help you learn more about how your depression works and how to address how you feel.**

You have lots of options for getting support with depression:

- mental health professionals at headspace centres and eheadspace (online and phone support) can help
- if you're at school, TAFE or uni, you may be able to access a counselling or student wellbeing service
- in certain instances, your general practitioner (GP) might also suggest antidepressant medications. The GP or service you reach out to will help to recommend an approach that works for you.



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# what is an eating disorder?

## **An eating disorder is a diagnosed type of disordered eating.**

Disordered eating is when a person has an unhealthy relationship with food and eating. These habits and behaviours can lead to the development of an eating disorder, which impact every aspect of someone's life.

*We can all experience unhealthy eating habits from time to time.*

Unhealthy eating habits come and go, but for some people, they can become a real problem. Extreme concerns about weight or how our body looks, are a sign that it's time to seek support.

Disordered eating often begins with dieting, but many factors can increase the risk that this may develop into an eating disorder. These include:

- family factors – like a family history of eating disorders
- individual factors – such as low self-esteem or wanting to do things perfectly all the time
- outside factors – like the influence of the media and social pressures to look a certain way
- life factors – like feeling overwhelmed and stressed by exams, work or relationships.

## **What to do if you think you have disordered eating**

Many people with disordered eating feel that their experiences aren't bad enough, or they aren't 'thin enough' to need professional help. No matter what a person weighs, how much or little they eat, anybody experiencing unhealthy eating patterns and distress about how they look should seek professional support. Eating disorders are a serious – and times life-threatening – health issue. If you're having problems with disordered eating or body image, it's important to seek professional support. The sooner you ask for help, the faster your recovery will be.

## **What are the symptoms and warning signs?**

The most common signs of disordered eating are:

### **Changes in behaviour**

- using food as a way to manage or express emotions
- repetitive or obsessive dieting
- frequent binge eating

### **Changes in thoughts and feelings**

- thinking and talking about food, weight and body appearance a lot of the time
- feeling out of control in relation to eating patterns
- worrying about places that involve food and eating
- preoccupation with exercise or body building
- feeling guilt and or shame about eating patterns
- fearing gaining weight
- difficulty concentrating

### **Changes in the body**

- often feeling tired and low in energy

People will experience these symptoms differently. It's important to seek professional support to make sense of them. Talking to a GP (General Practitioner) or someone that you trust – like a family member or friend – can help.

## Common types of eating disorders

### Anorexia nervosa

Anorexia nervosa is when a person experiences all of the following:

- getting less energy (food) than their body requires to maintain health
- having an intense fear of gaining weight
- seeing their body size or shape in a distorted and disturbed way.

People experiencing anorexia nervosa also have weight loss and/or are underweight. There are two types of anorexia nervosa:

- **restrictive** (not eating enough and/or exercising a lot more than food intake)
- **binge-purge** when a person eats (sometimes to excess) and then through some method removes that food.

Many people may change between these types.

### Bulimia nervosa

Bulimia nervosa involves a cycle of binge eating (eating a large amount of food quickly, in a way that feels uncontrolled), followed by actions to get rid of the food eaten.

People experiencing bulimia nervosa usually have strong feelings of distress, guilt and shame about these experiences, and are often very critical of their body.

### Binge eating disorder

Binge eating disorder involves repeated episodes of binge-eating, often with a sense of loss of control while eating.

### Avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder

A person may avoid eating certain foods based on the sensory characteristics such as the smell, appearance or texture. This can lead to unintentional weight loss and other issues with nutrition and physical health.

### Other specified feeding or eating disorders

These terms are used to describe an eating disorder that significantly impacts a person's life, but does not meet full criteria for one of the other types of eating disorder.

For more info about eating disorders visit The Butterfly Foundation or the InsideOut Institute. [butterfly.org.au](http://butterfly.org.au) or [insideoutinstitute.org.au](http://insideoutinstitute.org.au)

## What are the related mental health problems?

Young people experiencing eating disorders are more likely to have these other mental health difficulties also:

- anxiety
- neurodevelopmental disorders (such as ADHD, conduct disorder, oppositional defiance disorder)
- substance use disorders
- self harming behaviours and suicidal thinking.

## Self-help tips to support recovery

Alongside professional help, if you think you may be developing signs of unhealthy eating habits, there are many things that you can do to help get on top of things.

### Our headspace clinicians provided their tips for helping young people recover from mental illness:

#### Seek support from people you trust

Knowing that you're not alone on your recovery journey can be really powerful. Reach out for support from a close friend, family member, school counsellor or others who have experienced an eating disorder in online support groups, like The Butterfly Foundation and the InsideOut Institute.

Try to be open about your feelings – feelings of anger, fear, exhaustion, guilt, shame – they are all part of being human. Being open and honest about these feelings with supportive people can help to remind you that you're not alone, and to find self-acceptance.

#### Reconnect with who you are

Disordered eating can be tough and at times you might forget there is more to you than these challenges. Reconnecting with the other parts of you can help to build up your identity 'outside' of the disorder. Part of the recovery process can be getting to know yourself again, or even re-defining yourself in some ways. Try getting back into things you used to enjoy or experiment with new things.

#### Be kind to yourself

Recovery can take some time and it can feel exhausting, so try not to be hard on yourself if things aren't going well. Keep a journal to record your achievements and successes along the way. When you hit a rough patch, looking back at this journal can help keep your energy and motivation up.

Celebrate the wins that you have, even if they're small. Show yourself a lot of love and pride throughout these wins.



## How can I get help?

It can be a good idea to see a GP (General Practitioner) who can help support you with your physical health needs as well as assist you in accessing the right mental health support.

You can make an appointment to chat to someone at your local headspace centre, or find online and phone support at [headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au). Your school, university or workplace might also have a counselling or student wellbeing service.

#### Other useful websites

- The Butterfly Foundation – resources, phone, email, and live webchat support. [butterfly.org.au](http://butterfly.org.au)
- InsideOut Institute – information about eating disorders. [insideoutinstitute.org.au](http://insideoutinstitute.org.au)



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# understanding grief and loss

**(it's a natural part of life)**

Grief is an individual experience, it's what happens after you lose someone or something important to you. You don't have to know the person for their loss to impact you. Everyone experiences grief differently. Our culture, gender, age, past experiences of loss, and belief systems can also affect the way we grieve. So try not to compare yourself to anyone else, or get too worried about the way you grieve – everyone grieves differently.

## What is grief?

Grief is a normal response to loss and it can affect many parts of our lives. Sometimes it can make the simplest task feel like climbing a mountain.

### You might feel some or all of these:

- shock
- longing
- guilt
- disbelief
- anger
- abandonment
- pain
- resentment
- anxiety
- intense sadness
- regret
- worry.

The combination of any of these feelings might make it feel like you're out of control. Other times you might only feel one of these emotions, or a numbness that doesn't feel like anything at all. Sometimes these intense bursts of emotion can last for a long time, other times they can come and go quickly.

## Changes to thoughts

When a big change happens in your life it can be hard not to think about it all the time. You might notice your mind wanders and you have trouble focusing.

Some people find it hard to care as much about the things they normally care about. It can feel like nothing matters compared to the loss they've experienced. Some people might think that the world doesn't make sense anymore, and they can't figure out their place in it.

## Changes in your body

Our mind and body are closely connected, so it makes sense that grief can have a big impact on our bodies. You might experience:

- headaches
- body aches
- weight changes
- changes to your sleep
- changes to eating routines
- colds
- tiredness
- generally feeling sick and run down.

## Changes in what you do

You might notice some big changes in the sorts of things you do or don't do. After a big loss, some people feel like doing nothing. They can have trouble finding the energy to keep up with day-to-day life. They might not want to see their family and friends, or withdraw from doing things they enjoy.

Other people find that keeping busy helps them to get through the day.

## How long will this go on for?

It's hard to know how long grief will affect you because everyone's experience is different. However, it's important to know that eventually, things will get easier.

It might be helpful to think of grief like the ocean. Sometimes the power of the ocean is so strong you can feel out of control. Other times it feels manageable and you are able to drift along with the waves. The pain of grief can come in huge waves, smaller waves or sideways waves. Sometimes there might be waves you didn't see coming, and sometimes there are periods of calm between the waves.

## What else should I look out for?

When you're experiencing grief, you might have trouble maintaining relationships and feeling connected to others. You might not be as patient when you're grieving, or you might find you get in conflict with people more often. This can be hard, because staying connected to others can be a really important part of getting supported while we grieve.

Grief isn't depression. But it's important to know that grief can leave you vulnerable to experiencing depression in the future. If you're not sure what's happening for you, it can be helpful to reach out for support.



**During tough times, some people can turn to alcohol or other drugs to try to get through the pain. This might feel helpful at the time but it can create other problems and you might be more likely to say or do things you'll regret.**

## What can I do to help with my grief?

Grief, and everything that can come with it, can be really intense. If you've experienced loss there are things you can do.

### Healthy habits

Doing simple things for your physical health can really help you handle the challenges of grief. Start with little goals, like fitting in some fruits and veggies and drinking enough water. Staying active and locking in good sleeping habits can also help.

### Get into life

You might not feel like it but doing things can be one of the best ways to help things improve. Find something that works for you like playing or listening to music, walking, hanging out with friends, watching movies, playing sports or reading.

## Take it easy on yourself

Being kind to yourself is a good idea at all times, but even more so when you're having a tough time. Remind yourself that grief hurts, it's hard and it takes time to heal. Feeling confused, overwhelmed, angry (or anything else) and having a cry is OK.

## How can I get help?

If you're finding it hard to cope and/or your social, work or school life are being affected, then it's a good idea to ask for support.

Find someone you trust and let them in on what you're going through. If you're feeling up to it, let them know what you need from them. Maybe you just need them to listen, or maybe you need a distraction to get you through tough days.

If you want professional support, you have lots of options. You can:

- contact Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800 ) or Lifeline (13 11 14)
- check in with your local GP (general practitioner).



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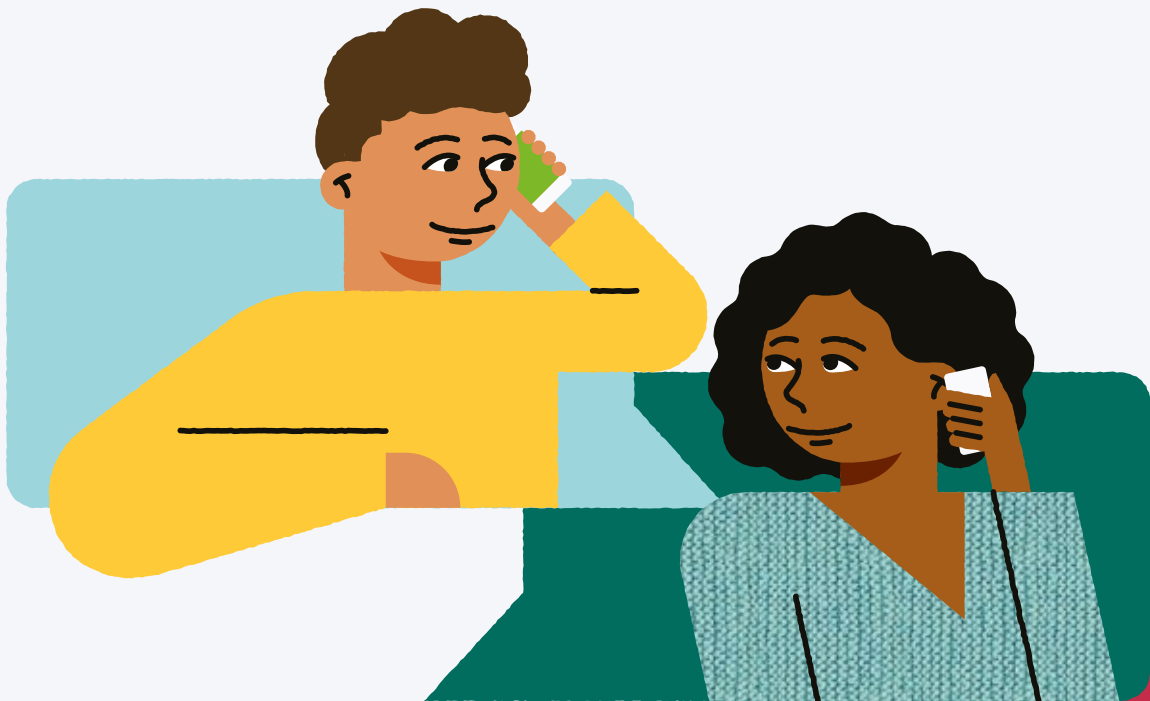
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how to help

# a friend going through a tough time

**When you know a friend is going through a tough time, it can be hard to know what to do or say.**



## Helping a friend who's having a tough time

When you see a friend having a tough time, it's a good idea to reach out and offer support. You might have noticed they don't seem like themselves, or they're not acting the way they normally do. Finding the words to start a conversation isn't easy, especially when you don't know what kind of help you can offer. It can make a big difference to someone experiencing difficulties.

It can be as simple as checking in, letting them know that you care and that you're there to help them. Let your friend know what changes you've noticed, that you're worried about them and that you'd like to help.

Even if they don't open up much at first, simply showing you have their back can give your friend strength and hope. This also tells them that you're someone they can talk to if they do decide to open up later on.

## What if my friend doesn't want any help?

Some friends need time and space before they feel ready to get support. Being afraid of things changing or being judged, can be a big factor in why people don't seek support when they need it.

You may need to be patient with your friend and try not to judge them or get frustrated if you can't get through to them at first. Remind them that you are there if they need you. Give them time.

Sometimes you might need to involve someone else – this may be a trusted adult. If you do decide to tell someone, try to let your friend know that you're planning on doing this first and encourage them to get involved in the discussion.

Letting someone else know can be a difficult decision to make, especially if they don't want help. You might be worried they may lose trust in you. There's a chance your friend might feel like this at first but remind them it's only because you care. In the long run, they will usually understand why you got someone else involved.

If your friend is at risk of harming themselves or somebody else, you need to seek help straight away, even if they ask you not to. If your friend needs urgent help you can call 000. You could also ask someone you trust, such as a parent or teacher for help.

## What can I say to help my friend with their mental health?

It's important to encourage your friend to get further support. You can say things like:

- 'Have you talked to anyone else about this? It's great you've talked to me, but it might be good to get advice and support from a health worker.'
- 'It doesn't have to be super intense and you can make choices about what's best for you.'
- 'Your GP (general practitioner) can actually help you with this stuff. You can find one that bulk bills, so you don't have to pay. I can go along with you, if you want?'
- 'There are some great websites you can check out to get more information. Have you heard of headspace or ReachOut or youthbeyondblue?'
- 'Did you know that you can get free and confidential support online or over the phone from places like headspace, Kids Helpline and Lifeline? All of these services are anonymous and can help you figure out what's going on for you and where to go for the right support.'
- 'I know you're not feeling great now, but with the right support, you can get through this. Lots of people do.'
- 'It's OK to feel this way and I'm here to have your back.' Make sure you validate your friend's concern and let them know they're not alone.

## Looking after yourself

Supporting a friend through a tough time can be difficult, so it's important that you take care of yourself, too. You can check out our tips for a healthy headspace fact sheets to look after your own wellbeing and build your mental fitness every day.

Try to remember that you're their friend and not their counsellor. Be realistic about what you can and can't do. Set boundaries for yourself to make sure that you're doing the best thing for yourself, your friend and the friendship.

If you're feeling overwhelmed and need support for you, it might be a good time to reach out for extra help. A good place to start is a trusted adult (e.g., family member, teacher or GP). You can also contact Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800).



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tips for a

# healthy headspace

**Good mental health and wellbeing allows you to live your life in a positive and meaningful way and cope with life's changes and challenges.**

## Keeping a healthy headspace

Good mental health is a state of wellbeing where you feel able to work and study, feel connected to others, be involved in activities in your community and 'bounce back' when life's changes and challenges come along.

### How can I boost my mental health?

**Our headspace clinicians offered their insights on some practical ways to improve your wellbeing every day.**

**Get enough sleep.** Sleeping well is good for your brain and body, and helps you feel energised, stay focused and protect your mental health. See our sleep fact sheet for more information and advice.

**Eat well.** Eating well can improve your mood, energy levels and general health and wellbeing. Fill up on nutritious food (like veggies, fruit and whole grains) and drink plenty of water to give your body and brain all the power it needs to function well.

**Get in to life.** Keep doing the stuff you love to do and the things that are important to you. It can help keep the fun in your life, give you a sense of accomplishment and purpose, boost your confidence and help to connect with others.

Some of these things, such as skating, reading or playing the guitar, might just be for fun, but other things like work or study can give you new skills and might help to give you meaning.

**Stay active.** Staying active can help you to sleep better, manage stress and boost your mood.

Make time to take a break from study or work or hanging out, whether it be going to the gym, kicking a ball around with a mate or just going for a walk. Whatever it is, start small, and make sure it's something you enjoy.

**Connect.** Spending time with family, friends (including pets) and people in your community can help strengthen your mental health and wellbeing. You can try things like:

- volunteer work
- hobbies
- clubs or committees
- sports.

Just like physical fitness, mental fitness takes regular effort. But sometimes life can get in the way of improving your mental health. Here are some important things to know.

**Learn new ways to handle tough times.** Taking time to think about how you're handling tough times is really important. Sometimes the things we do naturally can help, and other times they don't.

Increase your options for handling tough times as they'll come in handy now and into the future. Some options to consider include:

- using art, music or journaling to express yourself
- spending time in nature
- setting some small goals, and getting help seeing them through
- talking kindly to yourself
- searching for websites and free apps that can help.

**Cut back on alcohol and other drugs.** Cutting down on the amount of alcohol and other drugs that you take, or avoiding alcohol and other drugs altogether, will help you sleep better, feel better, and keep a healthy headspace.

Even though alcohol and other drugs may make you feel good in the very short term, they can impact your mental health and make you feel much worse in the long run.

### How can I get help?



***"If a problem feels like it's too big to deal with by yourself it probably is. It's important to speak up and get support from friends and family."***

Dani, hY NRG member  
(headspace Youth National Reference Group)

If you feel like support from family and friends isn't enough, seek professional help. You can see your general practitioner (GP), make an appointment to chat to someone at your local headspace centre or visit eheadspace for online and phone support.

Remember, keeping a good mental health involves building your mental fitness, so you can stay on top of things and get the most out of each day.



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# get in to life

(to keep your headspace healthy)







*“Whenever I’m going through a difficult time, I know that doing things I enjoy – such as reading, listening to music, going out in nature – helps to lift my mood. It is a distraction from issues that may be weighing me down. It gives me a chance to get out of my own head for a while.”*

Alessandra, hY NRG member  
(headspace Youth National Reference Group)

Achieving small tasks and doing things you enjoy can boost your confidence and lift your mood – helping you keep a healthy headspace.

### The things you do and your mood

The activities you make time for have a big impact on your headspace. When you spend time doing things you enjoy (or used to enjoy), it can give you relief from hard times, and build some fun in your life. Likewise, when you set and achieve small tasks that are important to you (such as completing homework or giving back to your community) it can help to create a sense of accomplishment and meaning.

In a nutshell, doing ‘stuff’ matters. Yet, if you’re going through a difficult time, doing anything can seem like a lot of effort. And if you’re feeling low you may lose interest in things you once enjoyed.

So, what should you do? The key is to focus on doing – even if you don’t want to or feel like it. As you set and achieve even small tasks you will learn more about yourself, build confidence and improve your wellbeing.

Here’s how ‘doing stuff’ can help your headspace:

- give you a sense of achievement and purpose
- build your confidence
- lift your energy
- improve your motivation
- it can help get you out of a rut if you’re not feeling energised.

### Ask an expert: how can I do more stuff?

Here’s how our headspace experts suggest you get started:

- **Set small goals.** Setting and achieving goals builds confidence and self-worth. Think of a small task you want to do every day (maybe it’s making your bed, going for a 15 minute walk or calling a friend for a chat). It can be anything, the important thing is to set the goal and follow through.
- **Find activities you enjoy.** If you’re going through a hard time, you may not feel excited about doing anything. But think back – what did you used to enjoy? This can be a good place to start.
- **Make a schedule.** When you think of an activity, make time for it. Look ahead at your week and block out some time for the things that you enjoy.
- **Persist.** Find ways to follow through with your scheduled activity, even when you don’t feel like it. You may not feel like doing anything, so it might help to learn new ways to handle this.
- **Reflect.** Once you begin achieving your goals, take some time to reflect on how it makes you feel. Did you enjoy it? Did you feel a sense of accomplishment? If you did, that’s great. If not, that’s OK. You could try something else.
- **Be kind to yourself.** Maybe you try a new hobby that you’re not great at, but think of it as making time with yourself to learn and grow. Keep persisting and enjoy the journey of learning.

When you’re feeling low or stressed it’s important to put healthy habits in place – to give yourself a better chance of coping with life’s challenges.

Doing stuff and achieving little things every day is an important healthy habit, but it’s not the only one. Things like exercise, eating well, and spending time on your relationships are also important for good mental health.



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# learn skills for tough times



***“It’s OK to feel not okay – tough times happen for everyone. The fact that you’re reading this shows that you’ve noticed things aren’t so great, or that a friend or family member’s not feeling so great, and you want to do something proactive or different...”***

Liam – hY NRG member  
(headspace Youth National Reference Group)

Developing your own positive ways to handle tough times can help develop your self-awareness, build confidence and leave you more resilient – all helping to keep your headspace healthy.

## **Developing your personal coping strategies**

There’s no doubt about it, life can be hard sometimes. From relationship issues, to work and study stress, to days when we don’t feel great – we all go through stressful and emotional periods.

When that happens our coping strategies kick in – these are things that we’ve learnt over time that help us feel better. Some people naturally use ways of coping that are helpful – like journalling, meditation or speaking with friends. But for some of us, the way we cope can leave us feeling worse in the long term. We may stop doing things we enjoy, use alcohol and other drugs or disconnect from friends and family.

So, where should you start if you want to learn new ways to cope with difficult times? The important first step is to reflect on how you react to stress – taking time to understand *what* you do and *why* you do it. This builds your self-awareness. It can help you learn things about yourself that will help you handle tough times in the future. The more you understand yourself, the better you will be at applying more helpful strategies that *work for you*.

## **Learning new and positive ways to handle tough times can:**

- improve your self-awareness
- give you a sense of achievement
- build your confidence
- lift your energy
- improve your motivation.

## Develop your own healthy coping strategies

- **Notice how you respond in tough times.** Pausing for a few seconds before you engage in any type of coping strategy gives you the power to choose how you'd like to respond, rather than reacting automatically.
- **Reflect.** Think about whether your current coping strategies are helpful. This is not easy to do, and can take some practice. It might help to give yourself some time to ponder these questions, and write down anything that comes up:
  - How do I respond in tough times?
  - Do my thoughts or feelings influence what I do?
  - Is the way I respond useful or not?
  - Why do I think I respond in that way?
  - How can I approach the challenges differently?
- **It's never too late to begin.** It doesn't matter how long you've been having a tough time, there's always time to learn new coping strategies.
- **Make it work for you.** Your plan for dealing with tough times might be very different to someone else's. That's OK! Everyone is different. Coping with stress and emotion is individual.
- **Get support.** It can help to let those closest to you know your new coping strategies. That way, if you're distressed and struggling to think clearly, they can support you through your new plan.
- **Take notice.** Learn to notice how you handle these challenges and pay attention to whether the strategies are useful. Growth can come from how we manage the challenges that life throws at us. Noticing the benefits will help motivate you to try new ways, and help build your resilience.

## Ideas for how you can handle tough Times differently

- journaling
- using artwork to express your feelings
- writing down what you find difficult and potential ways to handle it differently
- catching up with friends and family
- deep breathing
- disconnecting from social media for a while
- spending time in nature
- practising being kind to yourself
- meditation
- exercise (even a short walk can be helpful!)



*“There are so many ways that you can do self-care, and for everyone that's different. I found goal-setting, or even schedule management, really helpful. Young people have a lot of stuff going on, they're trying to find work, keep active, keep up with study or work and it can get pretty hectic quickly, if you keep it all in your head.*

*Something as simple as having a diary – where you can plan out your days – can really help. It also just helps relax your mind from trying to keep everything in your head.*

*If you're able to do these positive things as part of your daily schedule, you can lean on this when you're feeling stressed. It's a lot easier to start when you're feeling OK, rather than when you're feeling really low.”*

Liam, hY NRG member  
(headspace Youth National Reference Group)

When you go through stressful periods, it's a good idea to put healthy habits in place – to give yourself a better chance of coping with life's challenges.

Having your own plan for looking after yourself in times of stress is important. Things like exercise, eating well and spending time on your relationships are also good for your mental health.

Regardless of your situation, there are lots of options to help you cope and you're never alone.



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# build and create close connections





***“I get a sense of satisfaction out of relationships, in terms of being able to connect with other people. It grounds me a lot. When I get stuck in my head, having relationships that I care about can bring me back out...”***

Sophia, hY NRG member  
(headspace Youth National Reference Group)

Putting time into your relationships can help you feel connected, boost your energy and, ultimately, keep your headspace healthy.

## Relationships and your mood

Healthy relationships are super important for your mental health. When you spend time with people you care about, who care about you, this can help you feel connected and supported.

Yet, we know relationships aren't always easy. Starting new relationships can often be scary. And if you're experiencing mental health difficulties you may feel like disconnecting from people, rather than reaching out.

But here's the thing – the more you work on your relationships, the stronger they get. Strong relationships can give you support when you need it and provide a sense of belonging and community. When you spend time connecting with and supporting others, your wellbeing improves, too!

**Investing in relationships can improve your mood by:**

- boosting your energy
- improving your sense of belonging
- helping you relax
- helping you feel supported.

## Ask an expert: how can I work on my relationships?

**Our headspace team have the following tips for navigating relationships.**

- Focus on positive relationships that make you feel good about yourself. Build relationships where you support each other and where you feel you can be yourself.
- Every relationship can bring you different benefits, so try to keep a variety of people in your life, such as friends from work or school, teachers, parents, people who have similar interests and more.
- Communication is important. When you are open with people, they will be more open with you – which strengthens your relationships.

- Understand that socialising and keeping relationships can be hard and have challenges. Occasionally you may feel left out, different, even criticised. Just remember, it's normal to feel this way sometimes and the feelings will pass.
- Your relationship with yourself is an important relationship too. And, when you look after yourself it can teach you how to look after others as well.



***“I find it hard to focus on relationships when I'm struggling. When I moved away from home for uni I was thrown into this environment where I didn't really know anyone and I did just have to make a lot of attempts at making friends. I think that's probably been a big source of anxiety for me – going out, trying to meet people and knowing it's not always going to work out.***

***I wasn't a big party animal, I wasn't really extroverted. But I learnt that you don't have to change yourself to try and fit into new friendships and new relationships and things like that. I focused on small level interactions that might not always eventually turn into a relationship. I think just having the confidence just to say, “Hi, how are you going?” Small talk was good to stay connected with my wider social environment.***

***I've come to see that working on relationships brings me out of my shell, not just talking to people, but getting out of the house and going to events and meeting new people as well. Sharing those new experiences, it gives me more energy, a bit more life and meaning, I guess. It's a chance to find out more about yourself and others.”***

Sophia, hY NRG member  
(headspace Youth National Reference Group)

## Healthy habits

When you're feeling stressed, anxious or low on energy it's important to put healthy habits in place – to give yourself a better chance of coping with life's challenges.

Your relationships are so important for your general wellbeing. When you strengthen your relationships, and focus on forming healthy habits – such as cutting back on alcohol and drugs, sleeping well, and spending time with people you love – you put yourself in a great position to keep a healthy, happy mind.



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# what is healthy electronic gaming?

Gaming can be a positive and enjoyable pastime. It can help us to connect with others, feel socially included and improve our self-esteem. Healthy gaming can help us to have structure and routine in our lives and provides some beneficial downtime, relaxation and fun.

## When gaming becomes a problem

Gaming, like any behaviour, can cause harm if it is taken to extreme levels.

- For a very small number of young people, gaming can have a significantly negative impact in their everyday lives.
- These problems seem to be most common for young men between the ages of 12–20 years of age, but can occur in any gamer population.

If you think that your internet use or gaming is beginning to contribute to some problems in your life, there are lots of things you can do to get back in control.

## Signs of possible problems with gaming

It is not necessarily the amount of time you spend gaming that causes a problem, but when gaming takes time away from doing activities that keep you healthy and well. For example, you might find that you are spending less time than usual with people you care about. You might be doing less exercise or find that you are having trouble sleeping or getting to school or work. You might be feeling some distress or starting to feel less confident.

If you are experiencing some of these symptoms below, it might be a sign that gaming is starting to have a negative impact on your everyday life:

- feeling sad, irritable, anxious, frustrated or angry when you are not able to access digital or video games
- changing sleep patterns or sleep difficulties such as getting up too early or staying up too late to game
- being aggressive or experiencing conflict with others over gaming
- it's OK to feel frustrated at a loss or situation from time to time but gaming should be a positive experience and if it isn't this may be a sign that something is wrong
- other people expressing concern at the amount of time you spend gaming or online
- spending less time with family and friends than you normally would
- being preoccupied with gaming (spending large amounts of time thinking about the next gaming session or past sessions)
- losing track of time and a loss of control over the time you spend gaming so important things get missed, such as appointments or other commitments
- feeling physical pain or irritation, for example pain in your neck, wrists, or back, dry or red eyes
- eating meals while playing or skipping meals
- spending more money than you can afford on new games or in-game purchases
- using gaming as a way of avoiding other activities.

You might also notice other changes in your life that don't appear directly related to your gaming such as:

- loss of interest in school and other activities that you previously enjoyed
- lowered self-esteem or self confidence
- poor eating habits
- headaches/migraines
- decreased personal hygiene
- performing less well at school or work.







## Related problems

People who have difficulty with gaming may also be experiencing other mental health conditions, for example, difficulty managing their mood.

## Supporting yourself and getting help

Take a "health check" on your gaming and internet use. Is it a fun activity that is helping you to feel good? How is your balance with other activities that keep you healthy and well? Are you feeling more or less connected to others?

There are a lot of tips that can help with keeping your game time in balance. Time on screens can sneak up without you realising it. Here are some things that you could consider.

-  Leave your internet and gaming time for after your jobs are done. Treat it as a reward.
-  Decide in advance how much time you want to spend online and set a timer.
-  Set up times to "unplug".
-  Make mealtimes screen free.
-  Have other hobbies and interests that you enjoy regularly, like seeing friends or playing sport.
-  Charge your devices outside of your room or perhaps don't have them in your bedroom at all. You will reduce the temptation to be online instead of sleeping.



Get up and move regularly. Doing some simple stretches can really help.



Take a sleep audit. How much are you getting? Sleep should be a priority, as it is important for our physical and mental health.



## where can I get help

If you find that your relationships, mood, school performance or work are being impacted by your continued or increased gaming use, then it might be useful to talk with someone you trust like a parent, teacher, school counsellor, family member or friend. A general practitioner (GP) is another good place to start when seeking help and information. You can also contact **ehespace**, your local **headspace** centre, or Kids Help Line if you wanted to talk to somebody about your internet and gaming use.



**With the right support, most people are able to get back to enjoying the benefits that gaming and internet use can contribute to their lives.**



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