



**Mental Health Guidance**  
For LGBTQ+ Young People

## IT'S OK NOT TO BE OK!

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There may be times when you do not feel OK. There may be times when you don't want to help yourself, when you don't want to talk to anyone, when you are not positive, when you feel no one understands, when all you want to do is hide in your room, get into bed and never come out. It's OK to not be OK. You can take time out.

### **It is not OK to stay that way.**

When you start feeling a little stronger it's time to try to help yourself and if necessary let others know how you are feeling and how you want them to help you.

Are you ok?

Yeah

Are you lying?

Yeah

That's ok

## WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

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Everyone has mental health! Put simply, it is our emotional and psychological wellbeing.

How good we feel about ourselves, and how we feel about what's going on in our lives. Your mental health can fluctuate throughout your lifetime. This fluctuation can be over days, weeks, months or years. We all have periods in our lives when we feel stronger mentally and other times when we feel less strong. This is completely natural.

Looking after your mental health is important for everyone. In the same way we look after our physical health we must also strive to maintain our mental health to keep us in top condition and feeling good.

This resource is for you to think about your own mental health, how you are acting, thinking and feeling. How you may be reacting to stress in your life, how you relate to others, the choices you make and the ways you can help yourself gain better mental health. There is also some advice for ways your parent(s) or carer(s) can help you, so let them read this resource too.

# CHANGES IN YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Here are some things you may be experiencing that may signify changes in your own mental health:



<b>Tearfulness</b>	<b>Poor decision making</b>	<b>Changes in appetite</b>
<b>Feeling anxious</b>	<b>Being easily distracted</b>	<b>Low self esteem</b>
<b>Low mood</b>	<b>Being irritable</b>	<b>Apathy</b>
<b>Feeling overwhelmed</b>	<b>Unable to control your emotions</b>	<b>Fatigue</b>
<b>Sleeping less or more</b>	<b>Feeling less sociable</b>	<b>Hopelessness or despair</b>
<b>Poor concentration</b>	<b>Intrusive thoughts</b>	<b>Spacing out</b>
	<b>Aggression</b>	

Everyone can have a bad day, often you will bounce back quite quickly. However, if these feelings continue for longer periods of time and do not seem to be going away, you could be experiencing a period of poor mental health.

The good news is that you absolutely can do something about your mental health and you are not alone on this journey. There are people who can help you and young people just like you who are feeling the same way.

# HOW CAN YOU BOOST MENTAL HEALTH?

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There are lots of things you can do to boost mental health. Some are a short term fix others need a little extra work for them to be beneficial. Everyone's mind and mental health works differently, it is unique to each person. Finding the right method for you to help yourself is important. Take time to figure out for yourself what that is and you will be on the right path to boosting your mental health, maintaining it and enjoying it. Here are some steps and ideas of how you can do this:

**Talk to a friend or family member you trust** - Talking always helps. A problem shared is a problem halved! It really is true and not just a saying! Tell someone you really trust, a friend, a family member, a teacher or a youth worker, how you are feeling. Don't bottle your emotions up inside, let them out and talk about them. When we talk about something that is worrying or stressing us we often find that the person we are telling has solutions we wouldn't have thought of, or that the thing which is bothering us can be fixed. Sometimes, just by talking about the problem or issue can help you realise you are not alone and solutions exist.

**Get some fresh air and breathe** - Feeling stressed? Smothered? Can't breathe? Go outside by yourself, take a walk and breathe deep, slow, long breaths in and out. Repeat as necessary. Getting a walk of any length of time can help boost your mental health because it gives you space to think and reflect. Problems which cause us to feel anxious, stressed or low can seem much smaller once we remove ourselves from negative environments.

**Get the right amount of sleep** - The average teenager gets just over 7 hours of sleep per night. However teenagers actually need between 9 and 9.5 hours of sleep to function and be energised for the day ahead. Lack of sleep will affect mood, behaviour, cognitive ability and academic performance. It can be hard to sleep when you are feeling anxious, worried or stressed. Exercise, mindfulness and meditation can all help with relaxing the body and mind to aid in a restful nights sleep. In addition make sure you turn off any devices like laptops, phones and TV's in your room, avoid over sleeping at the weekends, try to maintain regular sleep patterns and avoid caffeine, smoking, alcohol and drugs. If you are worried about lack of sleep or over sleeping always talk to your GP.

**Exercise** - A little goes a long way, you are not trying out for an Olympic team, so just do what you can. Any form of exercise as long as it increases your heart rate for at least 30 minutes is highly beneficial. Your body will release endorphins (the happy hormone) that increases your mood naturally. Regular exercise, at least

three times a week, can combat low moods, anxiety or stress. The body and mind are linked. When you exercise one, it benefits the other. The benefits of even light exercise, such as walking, are huge. It can clear the mind, allow time to calm down, improve our mood and release tension we hold inside.

**Meditation, Yoga, Mindfulness** - You do not have to do all three, however they are all powerfully positive ways in which you focus your mind, create stillness and be present by not worrying or over-thinking the future or the past. Try instead to focus on the present, live in the moment, where you are right now. By doing so you will take your attention from whatever it is, in your past or future, that is worrying you.

Allow yourself to be present, think about what you are doing and only think about that. For example making a cup of tea or coffee - think about each deliberate action it takes to complete the task. Did you allow your mind to wander? Did you stay in the present? If you did, well done, if you didn't, keep trying!

Do not relive past arguments or bad experiences, try as best you can to let them go. Instead focus on yourself and promote your own positive mental health by being fully present and aware. Try a simple meditation - focus on your breathing, on a candle or use guided meditations. Have a go! Check out the suggested Apps we recommend later in this resource.

**A good diet** - Food and your mood are connected. Eating the right foods will give you more energy, improve your mood and help you think more clearly. Here are some top tips:

- Eat 5 pieces of fruit or veg daily.
- Eat a balanced diet, carbohydrates, proteins and fats.
- Try to eat regularly - breakfast, lunch and dinner, with healthy snacks.
- Reduce the amount of sugar and salt in your diet.
- Try to eat less food which is high in fat, such as fast food and takeaways.

**Stay Hydrated** - Water is essential for a healthy mind and body. It helps with your energy levels and brain function. Doctors and nutritionists suggest 6-8 glasses are needed per day. Caffeine drinks are popular with young people. These are counter productive as they are packed with sugar or artificial sweeteners and loaded with caffeine which affects mood, heightens anxiety and disrupts sleep. The best alternatives are sugar free drinks and water.

**Positive self talk** - Most people are not good at positive self talk. Most are however excellent at negative self talk, that is, putting yourself down when you get something wrong or act in a way you later regret. Positive self talk is when you say nice things to yourself about yourself. It is when you pat yourself on the back for doing something good. It is about being kind to yourself. The mind believes what you tell it, so talk kindly and positively to yourself.

### What do you say to yourself?

“I am a good friend”

“I did well today at school”

“I’m able to make my little brother laugh”

“I am great at football”

“People like me when I sing, I have a great voice”

“I like myself when I’m kind to others”

### Surround yourself with positive people

- Make and maintain friendships and relationships with positive people who help to lift and boost your mood. There are two types of people in this world, radiators or drains. Radiators give off positive energy, you are drawn towards them as they make you feel good, warm and safe. They offer comfort and complements, and would rather give than receive. The other group are drains, they always take from you and never give back, they are cold, they take the fun and pleasure out of everything. They leave you feeling empty and used. Who would you rather be close to? Which one would you rather spend time with or be yourself? Healthy relationships are crucial for maintaining your mental health.

**Set realistic goals** - It’s good to set goals for the future. Setting realistic goals will help you achieve milestones one at a time. Set a goal, achieve it, positive self talk and repeat! Goals can be short, medium or long term. You can constantly change and amend them. They are your goals so you are in charge of what they are. When you achieve a goal, acknowledge and celebrate it, then set another goal - never stop setting yourself goals. We all work better and are more focused when we have our sights set on an achievement. Setting and achieving short-term goals such as increasing physical activity, getting more sleep or eating healthier, may lead onto achieving medium or long-term goals which will be beneficial in boosting self-esteem, self-confidence and mental health.

**Talk to a counsellor** - Sometimes even after working hard by trying to help yourself you may still feel your mental health is not where you think it should be or what it to be. Talking to someone is the next natural step. If you had a sore arm or a cough that wasn't going away you would go to your GP, it's the same thing. A counsellor is a doctor for your mind. Counselling can be accessed through LGBTQ+ organisations, schools or youth clubs, privately or through your GP's.

**Do whatever makes you feel good** - whether that's reading, meditating, gaming, cycling, watching movies, listening to your favourite music, doing what you enjoy has a massive mental health benefit. It's about making time for yourself by doing something enjoyable and fun, or perhaps just relaxing. It's OK to take some time out for yourself. Sometimes you might feel under pressure from family, friends or school, so it is vital to plan time into your day when you can just stop, breathe and relax.

**Stay away from Drugs, Alcohol and Tobacco** - these are mood depressors. They will impair your mental and physical abilities. They may have short term mood enhancing properties but they are all addictive depressants that are linked to poor physical and mental health. If you are worried about your consumption levels of drugs or alcohol you should talk to your GP.

“Everyday  
begins  
with an  
act of  
courage and  
hope - getting  
out of bed.”

MASON COOLEY

# LGBTQ+ MENTAL HEALTH

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There are many issues and situations that adversely affect young people's mental health within the LGBTQ+ community. These can be difficult to talk about. They may even feel insurmountable. Talking to someone about such challenges will help. You do not have to face them alone. Let someone know what is going on, a parent, carer, teacher, youth worker or a friend. Never stay silent!

**Bullying** - Bullying is when someone makes you feel less than or puts you down for who you naturally are. It may take various forms, cyber, verbal, non verbal, emotional and physical. It may be homophobic, transphobic or biphobic bullying. Bullying can make you feel very low, vulnerable and alone. If someone is making you feel this way - it needs to stop, it must be reported. If you are being bullied in school, at home or at work, you must tell someone you trust. By doing so, they can help you. Whomever you decide to talk to, be honest about what is happening and who is involved. Remember you are not alone and the bullying is not your fault. Your school has a duty of care and must record the incident. If you feel the bullying is not being taken seriously by your school you should report the incident immediately to Cara-Friend.

If you feel you are a victim of a hate crime - that is when someone uses your sexual orientation and/or gender identity by discriminating against you through cyber, verbal or physical violence, this must be reported to the police. Hate crimes are taken very seriously. If you don't feel comfortable reporting the incident to the police you can also contact The Rainbow Project's Hate Crimes Advocate.

Talking to someone is a sign of strength. Cara-Friend delivers All Out, an anti-bullying workshop for students and young people. This workshop helps students gain understanding about the LGBTQ+ community and why bullying is wrong. If you think your school would benefit from this training let Cara-Friend know.

**Gender Dysphoria / Gender Incongruence** - Gender dysphoria is a medical term used to describe the feeling someone has towards their body. It is discomfort or distress, which can be mild to severe. It may be hatred or dislike of one's body or its parts due to a person identifying as a gender identity different to the gender they were assigned at birth.

Gender Incongruence is the feeling that one's gender identity is different or opposite to the gender a person was assigned at birth. It is a medical condition related to sexual health, where treatment may include hormone therapy and genitourinary care amongst others.

If gender dysphoria or incongruence is something that you have been feeling it may be helpful to talk to someone you trust. Connecting with other young people who feel the same way would also be beneficial. By doing so you know you are not alone. Organisations such as Cara-Friend and Gender Jam help young people connect and build peer and friendship groups which can be a positive and meaningful step forward.

**Poor Peer Network** - There are times when we can find ourselves with fewer friends than we may wish, but friendship should be about quality and not quantity. Sometimes young people who are not LGBTQ+ can be judgemental towards the LGBTQ+ community due to lack of knowledge and education. But real friends will understand and be accepting. If you are telling a friend about your sexual orientation or gender identity please tell someone you absolutely trust with that information.

It is also important to realise that friends come and go throughout childhood and adolescence. Sometimes it is necessary to let people leave your peer network in order to allow new friends to enter. A friend should never make you feel less than or bad about yourself. Surround yourself with people who lift you up and energise you, who make you feel good, ultimately someone you enjoy being around for the right reasons.

**Internalised Homophobia/Biphobia/ Transphobia** - Quite simply this is a feeling of dislike, embarrassment, loathing or hatred towards oneself due to being part of the LGBTQ+ community. You may have internalised homophobia, biphobia or transphobia due to being around negative opinions from family, friends, cultural groups or churches. It may stop you from accepting who you really are. It may prevent you from making decisions in your life, preventing you from pursuing relationships or friendships and ultimately stop you from being yourself.

How can you stop internalised homophobia, biphobia or transphobia? Firstly, learn to love yourself, you are perfect just the way you are. You are just as good as the person beside you whether they are LGBTQ+ or not. Secondly, try to tackle the sources of your internalised homophobia/transphobia. Distance yourself from people that talk negatively about the LGBTQ+ community. Join LGBTQ+ youth groups where you can be a part of the community and where you can build peer relationships therefore distancing yourself from negative attitudes. Take part in events such as Pride to see the support that exists within and for the community. Thirdly, be an advocate by calling people out on homophobic, biphobic and transphobic remarks and re-educating friends who use remarks that cause offence. By helping your friends be more inclusive you will start to feel more confident about being part of the LGBTQ+ community.

**Unsupportive School** - Having an unsupportive school or a school that says nothing positive about the LGBTQ+ community can be a very lonely and even scary place. Schools should be spaces where each and every young person regardless of their religion, cultural background, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity, feels valued, supported and accepted for who they are. It is fair to say that some schools are leaps and bounds ahead of others with regards to inclusivity. All schools have a duty of care for each student. Having an ethos of inclusivity and respect for all is not in opposition to any other ethos a particular school may hold.

What should schools offer to be inclusive? They should have a gender neutral uniform policy so that students can choose the uniform that feel right for them. They should have gender neutral toilet facilities so everyone regardless of their gender identity has safe and comfortable toilet facilities. They should similarly have PE changing facilities that offer safe changing areas to all students. Students regardless of gender identity should have access to the sports they wish to play. Students should not have to self exclude from PE and schools need to be more accommodating to individual students needs. The language that staff and students use within the school environment should be supportive and inclusive at all times. The term “that’s so gay” should be treated the same way as homophobic, biphobic and transphobic slurs.

So how can you get your school to listen? Secondary Schools can learn more about the LGBTQ+ community and specifically how to be more responsive to the needs of young people through the Inclusive School Programme. This involves LGBTQ+ Awareness Training for school staff and also an anti-bullying workshop called All Out for students. Cara-Friend also offer one to one support for students, parents or teachers who need more advice on dealing with any LGBTQ+ issues.

Cara-Friend have also compiled a resource specifically for teachers to encourage inclusive practice within the school environment. **“Teachers Resource - Encouraging LGBTQ+ Inclusive Practice”**. This resource is available on the Cara-Friend website. Cara-Friend also has information on how schools can start a Gay/Straight Alliance group which helps build knowledge and educates all young people about the LGBTQ+ community, specifically issues that affect young people. **“Gay Straight Alliance - A Guide for Youth Clubs and Secondary Schools”**. This is available from our website. If you feel your school is not being supportive, contact Cara-Friend and tell us why.

**Unsupportive Home/Family/Parents** - It is really difficult when you feel that the people closest to you, your parents and siblings are not supportive or understanding of who you are. Such discourse can lead to anger and frustration on all sides, but communication is the key to developing an environment where all can be heard and a greater understanding can be reached. This may not be an

easy task and may require a number of attempts to complete, but by having an adult conversation, allowing people to ask questions, allowing space and time for people to answer is vital in building family support. Your family members can often be your greatest allies, try to bring them along on your journey.

You may feel that you are not ready to come out to family members or don't know how to come out. This can be a scary time. It is something that all LGBTQ+ people go through. Coming out can be difficult. Cara-Friend have developed **“Coming Out - Guidance for Young People”**. It will help answer some questions you have about coming out. It is available on the Cara-Friend website now.

Cara-Friend have also compiled a resource specifically for parents and carers to give advice needed to speak to young people, be supportive and develop knowledge of the LGBTQ+ community. **“Parent and Carer’s Resource - Supporting Your LGBTQ+ Child”**. This resource is available on the Cara-Friend website.

**Questioning** - You may not be ready to come out because you are still questioning your sexual orientation and/or gender identity. All LGBTQ+ young people will go through questioning. How long this period lasts will depend on a number of factors. For example have you had a supportive or unsupportive family, peers, school, religious and social background? If your background has been supportive than your question period may be

shorter than someone with an unsupportive environment.

There is no right amount of time to question your sexual orientation and/or gender identity. You will know and understand when the time is right for you. Do not put pressure on yourself or allow others to pressurise you into making decisions before you are ready. Questioning takes as long as you need it to. Allow yourself this time and space to ask those internal questions and find the answers that are right for you.

**Religion/Faith** - Being LGBTQ+ does not mean that you have to turn away from religion or faith. In some quarters of Northern Ireland being LGBTQ+ goes against certain religious faiths. If you have grown up within a church or religion that speaks poorly about the LGBTQ+ community you can feel isolated and lonely, even fearful that others will find out about you and not understand. You may even feel internalised homophobia, biphobia or transphobia due to feeling this internal conflict.

There are churches, ministers, priests and others who are understanding and respect that people can be LGBTQ+ while having a religious faith. If you feel unsafe or uncomfortable in your current religious environment there are many others that will welcome you with open arms. Here are just a few examples:

Spectrum LGBT+ Christian Fellowship -  
Monthly meetings in Belfast.

All Souls Church Belfast -  
Sunday services in Belfast.

Just Love - Inclusive LGBTQ+ Movement -  
Rev. Andrew Rawding - Coalisland

**Bottled Up Emotions** - Our emotions help us regulate and express how we are feeling. When we are happy, we smile and laugh, indicating to others the joy felt inside. If we are sad sometimes we may cry, become quiet or hide away.

We have emotions for a reason. Crying for example is a physical manifestation of pain leaving the body, it is actually better to let the tears out than to hold onto the pain which is causing them. However sometimes we do hold onto and bottle up our emotions. Over time this may cause us even more mental and physical pain.

**Bottled up emotions lead to:**

- Presenting a tough exterior by building walls around you.
- Frequent mood swings.
- Feeling anxious or stressed.
- Feeling lonely.
- Increased frequency of headaches.
- Digestive issues.
- Gaining or losing weight.
- Gagging reflex.
- Feeling nauseated

Emotions are a good thing - allow yourself you experience the full range, but perhaps not all at once. So here is a checklist of how to regulate your emotions:

- **Accept your feelings** - You can't just turn feeling off. Accept how you feel, but how long you want to feel that way depends on you.
- **Release and recover** - Sometimes holding onto emotions such as anger is counterproductive. The sooner you let it go the faster you can gain control.
- **Talk it out** - Talking really does help! Telling someone how you are feeling will help you deal with and process the emotions.
- **Keep working on it** - Sometimes your first reaction is not the best reaction, but as long as you can identify this, you can work on reacting better next time. Don't be too hard on yourself!

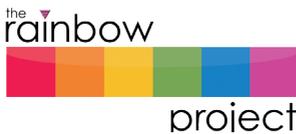
**“It is during our darkest moments that we most focus to see the light.”**

**ARISTOTLE ONASSIS**

**Social Inequalities** - Social inequalities such as marriage equality can leave you feeling like LGBTQ+ people are second class citizens. Equal rights for trans people are also an ongoing issue that society and politicians must address. It is true that the LGBTQ+ community still do not have equal footing compared to others here in Northern Ireland. The LGBTQ+ community does however have a number of organisations and allies that are working hard to remove these inequalities for all and make Northern Ireland a more inclusive space for the LGBTQ+ community. You can get involved with these organisations and lend your voice and talents to actively put a stop to prejudice and discrimination. Together we will make a difference.

**“Your present circumstances don’t determine where you can go: they merely determine where you start.”**

**NIDO QUBEIN**



# RESILIENCE

Resilience is the ability to recover quickly from things that happen to you. It is your ability to cope with setbacks, barriers or anything that limits you from achieving something you want to do. Resilience is your emotional strength.

Young children are very resilient. When they are told not to do something they just find something else to do. Children are natural risk takers. They climb and jump, they fall down and get back up again and just keep going. There is no fear of failure, no worry of judgement, just the desire to keep trying and achieve their goal. They are very resilient.

As we mature at some point we start to lose some of our resilience. We hear all the time “you can’t do that”, “you aren’t good enough”, “you need to be careful” and “it’s too hard”. Some of us develop a dislike of change, while others cannot quickly adapt to a new path. We become fearful of what others will think, fearful of trying anything new, fearful of failure.

The following pages contain some exercises you can try to test your own resilience.

## How to be more resilient:

- Build a secure social network of friends and family that will offer support and advice.
- Problems can be challenging but if you learn from them, you may master them, thereby learning how to deal with them in the future.
- Celebrate any and all successes. Congratulate yourself. Give yourself a pat on the back for all that you do well, be your own number one fan.
- Set realistic goals that are achievable and make small and regular steps toward them.
- Take positive steps and take control of a situation or problem. Always think how the step will help you work through the problem.
- Develop interests and hobbies that make you feel good about yourself. If you can, be physically active as exercise is a key mood elevator.
- Remember to forgive past mistakes and learn from them instead. The only mistake is not learning from them.
- Remember to give yourself a break from time to time. Take time out to relax and breathe. Sometimes stillness is the answer.
- Never be afraid to ask for help. Nobody has the ability to do it all on their own, we all need help at times. The strongest people are those who ask for it.
- Get enough sleep for you. Sometimes this will fluctuate but always seek help if you are not getting enough for you or perhaps you feel you are sleeping too much.

## Exercise 1:

### RESILIENCE LIST

Give yourself 30 seconds to answer this question 5 times:

- **When I am faced with a problem I.....?**
- Here are some example answers to that question:
  - I go to the gym, for a run or a walk
  - I panic
  - I play with my dog or cat
  - I avoid thinking about the problem
  - I talk to friends or family
  - I feel sick and stressed
  - I sleep on it and see how I feel in the morning
  - I think about ways to solve the problem
  - I put the problem out of my mind
  - I get anxious
  - I worry
  - I get emotional and cry

There is no right or wrong answer to this question. But have a look at your answers and see if you can see a theme emerging.

- **Are you avoiding the problem?**
- **Are you giving yourself time to consider the problem and come up with solutions?**
- **Are you seeking others advice in dealing with the problem?**
- **Are you being realistic and optimistic about what you can achieve?**
- **Are you taking positive action to solve the problem?**



## Exercise 2:

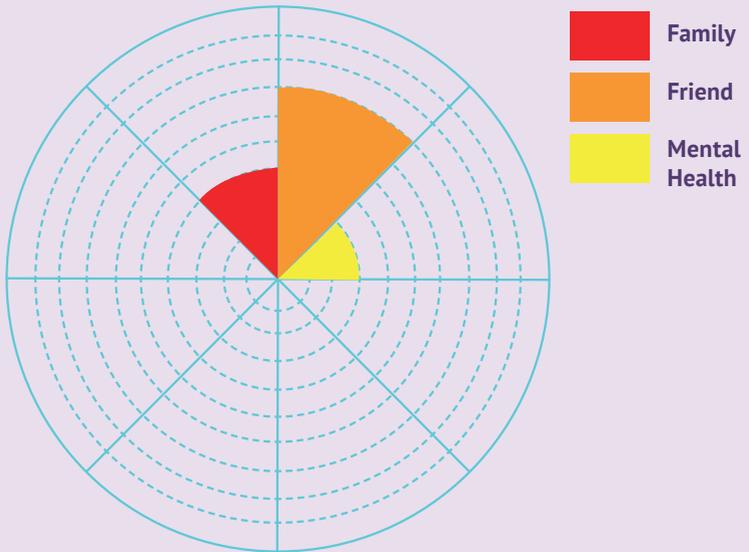
### LIFE WHEEL ASSESSMENT

Being happy and content in life is reflected by what is most important to us.

The Life Wheel Assessment can be used to look at areas in your life that need growth and development and it can serve as a visual aid to help you see what areas you wish to work on the most.

Name each of the 8 sectors, for example: Friendship, Family, Relationship, School/College, Confidence, Hobbies, Health (Mental), Health (Physical). Other heading may include, morality, religious faith, communication etc - make each sector relevant to you.

Rate your level of satisfaction in each section (10 being very satisfied), colour in the sectors to show a new outline and perhaps areas of your life that you would like to develop



After completing your Life Wheel. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What number am I now and what number do I want to be?
- What has caused me to give myself a certain number?
- What area do I want to focus on?
- What goals do I need to set myself to develop this area in my life?
- What support do I have and how can they help me?
- What structures do I need to put in place to ensure personal growth?

## Exercise 3:

### INNER WELLNESS RECORD

We all have an “inner well” that feeds us internally. Inner Wellness is our connection and balance between our inner self and the outside world. It is the feeling that we are loved, valued, accepted, belong and are connected to the world and people that surround us.

We must feed our inner wellness in order to feel this connection. Sometimes we can allow our inner wellness to run low, like a battery, this affects our ability to connect with the world and people in our lives. It is important to look after yourself, to feed your inner wellness, to keep this well of self acceptance and self love as full as possible.

One simple way is to write an “Inner Wellness Record”. It is a daily record of kind things you do for yourself and others. These are things that make you feel good about yourself.

Inner Wellness List:

- I had a hot relaxing bath.
- I took some time out to stop and relax.
- I listened to my favourite music.
- I spent time with friends.
- I had some healthy food.
- I helped an elderly lady carry her bags home.
- I went for a walk for 35 minutes in the park.

Talk a blank page and write the date on it

Draw a line down the middle so you have two columns.

Column 1: Things I did today to make myself feel good.	Column 2: Things I did today to help others.
Laughed with a friend	Walked an elderly ladies dog
Listened to my favourite music	Carried the shopping for my mum
Spent time with my family	Helped my best friend study for a test
Went for a run	

Keep a daily record so you can look back on all you have achieved. It can help you see days that you have not been as kind to yourself and therefore a reminder to be kinder tomorrow. It is a record of your desire to connect with yourself and the world around you, it is your “Inner Wellness Record”.

## Exercise 4:

### GRATITUDE JOURNAL

Gratitude is the feeling of appreciation and thanks. It could be being thankful for: material things, for people in your life, for opportunities, for experiences, or for lessons learned.

A Gratitude Journal allows you to record everything that we are grateful for on a daily or weekly basis. By being mindful in this way and taking time to contemplate and really focus on the people and other things in our lives that we are grateful for, no matter how small, can really be a positive and enjoyable experience. This can be done in a simple list form, for example:

Today I am grateful for:

- My family.
- My friends.
- My girlfriend/boyfriend/partner.
- I just got a new bike.
- My Xbox is fixed.
- I have a safe place to meet other queer young people like me.
- My mum made my favourite dinner.

I'm grateful for...

I'm thankful for...

I'm appreciative of...

I love the fact...

I'm doing good because...

I'm happy because...

# HELPFUL APPS

There are a number of helpful Apps that you might like to try.



### Headspace

Provides hundreds of meditations for every mood you may find yourself in.



### Calm

Calm sessions help you unwind and refocus your attention.



### Stop, Breathe, Think

Provides guided meditation to help you relax and let go of anxiety.



### Relaxing Sounds

Provides smooth nature sounds and ambient white noise for sleeping, naps and relaxation.



### 5 Minute Meditation

Provides guided meditation so you can feel calmer and more relaxed in just 5 minutes.

Here are lots of Apps you can try these are just a few. Have a go and see which ones suit you.

If you would like any additional help or information there are many organisations and charities that are only too happy to talk to you, offer advice and practical solutions. They are all there to offer support and guidance. Remember you are never alone and while it is OK not to be OK, it's not OK to stay that way.

Cara-Friend youth groups are located in Belfast and Derry-Londonderry with many regional groups throughout Northern Ireland. We are also available for one to one support if you wish to talk and can also signpost you to other organisations.



# ADVICE FOR PARENTS OR CARERS

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**Be an active listener** - Ask open questions like “how does that make you feel?”, “tell me more about that” - questions with more than a yes or no answer. Summarise what you are being told - this will allow your young person to hear back what they have told you, reflect and allow them to hear their own voice. Many topics will be difficult for them to talk about, allow them time to think and process their thoughts so they can clarify how they are feeling.

**Show affection** - Remember to let them know they are loved and safe. A kind word, holding their hand, an arm around their shoulder or a hug will indicate that you are there with them, for them and ready to listen.

Even though you give affection it may not be returned. Try to be respectful of their space (knock their bedroom door and waiting to be asked to come in), do not smother them (allow them time and space to breathe and be alone), never force them to give affection (a genuine hug will feel a hundred times more powerful than one they are forced to give).

**Encourage social interaction with friends and family** - Family and friends are vital in helping a young person deal with mental health challenges. Building a secure and supportive network of reliable people that they can talk and open up to is crucial in building positive mental health.

**Provide a peaceful and loving environment** - We all feed off others emotions. If a young person is experiencing negative emotions in the family home they can impact on their emotional state and mental health. It is important that we all have a safe space in our lives. Telling a young person that they are loved is a powerful act, it may be something they need to hear.

**Do activities together** - Being active is beneficial for two reasons. Firstly being active allows for the production of the happiness hormones endorphins, dopamine and serotonin and helps to reduce the stress hormone cortisol, thereby boosting mental health. Being active together also helps to build relationships and bonds by laughing and having fun together in a friendly active and or competitive or challenging environment.

**Let them know they can talk openly to you anytime about anything** - For some young people opening up to anyone is almost impossible. They may feel that what they are experiencing is just too personal, too different for others to understand or even too embarrassing. Therefore the only way a young person will know they can talk to you about anything at anytime is to actually tell them, over and over, until it

sticks in their mind that YOU are a safe person to confide in.

**Don't be afraid to seek advice from the professionals** - Sometimes it may be necessary to involve a mental health care professional. This professional can offer additional advice and support that your young person might need and respond to. Seeking help comes from a place of strength. Talk to your young person and make them a part of the discussion. Seek counsellors who are accredited with BACP or cognitive behavioural psychotherapists accredited with BABCP. School counsellors may be accessed by young people in school. Talk to your GP and ask their advice, counselling can be accessed for free on the NHS.

**Don't assume your child is OK** - Your young person may only be telling you part of the story, it is important to keep the levels of communication open and honesty is of paramount importance. Make yourself someone your young person confides in instead of someone they hide things from. Full disclosure is unlikely, but without good communication, poor or no disclosure is more likely.

**Be open and non-judgemental** - Don't pass judgement on your young person. Instead try to listen and understand what they are saying, what they have done or are going through. Try to accept where they are, then with understanding, communication and love you can plan a way forward together. Let them know they are never alone.

**Choose your timing wisely** - You may want to open a dialogue with your young person in order to find out what is wrong and how you can help them, but if they are not ready to talk, forcing them may make things worse. Let them come to you. You can assist them by letting them know you are there when they are ready to talk.

- You can let them know that you are a safe person to talk to by saying:
- I'm here for you if you ever want to talk.
- There is nothing we cannot discuss.
- There is nothing you could say that will make me love you less.
- You can always tell me how you are feeling.

**Look out for changes in mood or character behaviour** - Teenagers are prone to mood swings due to hormonal changes during puberty, as they mature this is completely natural. But anyone at any age can suffer from anxiety or depression. It is important to be aware of any significant changes in your young persons personality, behaviour or mood. For example:

- Changes in sleep.
- New onset of guilt.
- Changes in energy level.
- Changes in concentration or task completion.
- Changes in appetite.
- Changes in motivation.
- Thoughts of suicide.

Cara-Friend are always willing to offer our professional advice. There are also numerous external support agencies and charities from which young people and parents can gain advice and support.

# EXTERNAL SUPPORT FROM LGBTQ+ AND MENTAL HEALTH ORGANISATIONS:

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## Childline

0800 1111

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## Cara-Friend

Belfast: (028) 2989 0202  
admin@cara-friend.org.uk  
www.cara-friend.org.uk

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## Sail NI - Trans Resource Centre

(028) 9532 0023  
info@sailni.com  
www.sailni.com

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## Transgender NI

030 0302 3202  
info@transgenderni.org.uk  
www.transgenderni.org.uk

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## The Rainbow Project

Belfast: (028) 9031 9030  
Foyle: (028) 7128 3030  
info@rainbow-project.org  
www.rainbow-project.org

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## PIPS

(028) 9080 5850  
0800 088 6042  
info@pipscharity.com  
www.pipscharity.com

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## Aware NI

(028) 9035 7820  
info@aware-ni.org  
www.aware-ni.org

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## Mindwise

(028) 9024 8006  
www.mindwisenv.org

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## Action Mental Health

(028) 9182 8494  
www.amh.org.uk

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## CAMHS - Family Trauma Centre

(028) 9020 4700

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## CAMHS - Crisis Assessment and Intervention Team Beechcroft

(028) 9063 8000

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CAMHS are located in all the various regional areas across Northern Ireland. To make contact google CAMHS and your location for your nearest CAMHS service centre and contact details.

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# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

## Recommended Reading:

### For Parents:

#### Teenage Depression:

#### A CBT Guide for Parents

By: Monica Parkinson & Shirley Reynolds

#### Blame My Brain:

#### The Amazing Teenage Brain Revealed

By: Nicola Morgan

### For Young People:

#### Am I Depressed

By: Shirley Reynolds

#### Stuff That Sucks

By: Ben Sedley

#### Self-Esteem & Being You

By: Anita Naih

#### The Teenage Guide to Stress

By: Nicola Morgan

### Mental Health Websites:

- 1/ [www.thinktwiceinfo.org](http://www.thinktwiceinfo.org)
- 2/ [www.extern.org](http://www.extern.org)
- 3/ [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)
- 4/ [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)
- 5/ [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

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Cara-Friend Belfast and regional groups.





Written by Jo McParland in 2020

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