

A young man with short dark hair, wearing a dark blue and grey striped polo shirt, is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. He is leaning towards a woman on his right. The woman has curly brown hair, is smiling warmly, and is holding a white ceramic mug with a blue floral design. She is wearing a red and orange patterned top, a black and white beaded necklace, and large black earrings. The background is a warm, yellowish-orange wall with some abstract patterns.

Rethink
Mental
Illness.

Young and caring

for someone with
a mental illness



Young and Caring

for someone with a mental illness

Do you care for someone who has a mental illness? Is it all quite new to you? This leaflet is to help you make sense of things and to get the help you need. We have also asked other young carers about their own experiences, what helped them and, perhaps, you.

ACTIVITY



How long have I been a young carer?

How was I recognised as a young carer?

Which trusted adult most supports me?

(it would be good if you work through this leaflet with them)

This resource was produced by Rethink Mental Illness for young carers in focus in partnership with:



We have written this for young people who care for people who have a mental illness but a lot of the information may be useful for any young carer.

We will cover:

- Information about mental illnesses and how to find out more
- Ways of looking after yourself as a young carer

What does being a young carer mean?

It usually means that you spend quite a lot of your time or energy when you are not in school looking after someone else that is ill or needs extra help. It is not easy, and it is important to make sure you find ways of looking after yourself, but there are people out there to help. When you are a carer, some of that help is just for you, some is for the person you care for, and some is for both of you.

Can you think about who helps you and/or the person you care for? Make a note of who they are in the box below (we have put in a couple of examples to start you off, if you feel they do not apply to you cross them out):

ACTIVITY

Who helps us?

Doctor (GP)

My project worker

As a young carer you and your family are entitled to an assessment of your needs (do not worry about how this sounds) this is to check that you and the person you care for are getting support and you are not having to do too much. It also helps make sure that the sorts of people you have put in the box above are able to help in the ways they should. If your family have not had an assessment talk to your project worker, the support worker of the person you care for, or another trusted adult.

ACTION

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Speak to your project work, social worker or cared for persons support worker to find out more about assessments for your whole family. You could make a note below about some of the thinks you might like to talk about:

My notes and questions:

Example: *I want to talk about my school work and what happens when I need to study.*
I want to ask whether someone can help out when I need a break...

Finding out more about mental illnesses

If you care for someone with a mental illness, you might hear a lot of words and descriptions that you do not understand. It is also possible that people don't really tell you much about what is wrong because you are young, and they are trying to protect you. It makes sense that you want to understand what is going on.

ACTIVITY

When you hear the words 'mental illness' what does it make you think of? (don't worry about writing down whole sentences – just write or draw whatever words come into your head, and be really honest)

Mental Illness – what is it?

First of all, it can sound a bit scary. But, a simple way of thinking about it is by comparing mental illness to physical illness. A physical illness affects the body so much that it affects your ability to do normal, every day tasks for a long time.

- Diabetes
- Broken leg
- Headaches
- Cancer
- Multiple sclerosis

Whereas, a mental illness affect the mind, feelings and behaviours so much that it may (at times) affect your ability to do normal, every day tasks (for example, having a lot of negative thoughts and emotions which stops you from being able to go to school or work).

Mental illnesses happen due to many different reasons, just like the physical illness diabetes happens due to many different reasons. Some examples of mental illnesses:

- Depression
- Psychosis
- Stress and anxiety
- Self Harm
- Eating Disorders
- Bipolar



Having a mental illness does not mean someone is ill every day, or cannot live a normal life. It can be like having diabetes – people without the right treatment can be really unwell, and not able to do very much, but as long as they take their insulin and any other treatment, and keep an eye on their diet, they can live a very full, well life. It is important to remember that, like with physical illnesses, mental illnesses can be treated, and there are ways of coping and managing the illness. In many cases, whilst it can take time, people do recover.

ACTION



If you don't know the name of the illness, or much about it, it's okay. Make a note to yourself to find out by asking a trusted adult. Later on in this leaflet, we'll help you work out who can support you. Talk to them, and let them help you find out the information you might want to know. You could look at this website with them: <http://www.rethink.org/living-with-mental-illness/young-people/different-types-of-mental-health-problems>

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What is the name of the illness the person you care for has?

How would you describe what their illness is like?

What things worry you about their illness?

What questions do you have about their illness?

(Take these questions to a trusted adult who can help answer these)

Sometimes, you might hear other words used – some people talk about 'mental health problems' generally. You can use the words you feel most comfortable with. When you are young, people sometimes try to protect you, so you can end up feeling like you do not know enough about what is going on. If you are caring for someone, that can be especially difficult, as more information might help.

Sometimes, there are not really any clear answers. For example, it might be difficult for someone to tell you when they are going to get better. Most people who have a mental illness do get better, although they might need treatment or medication to keep them well. Either way, it is important to ask someone you trust if you have a question or worry.



ACTIVITY



Have a think. What else do you want to know about the illness of the person you are caring for? Who might be able to give you the answers?

What do I want to know?	Who could help me find out?

A note about “Doctor Google” or Google versus the GP

A lot of young people we have spoken to told us that when they want medical information they look on Google. It is often the first thing we think to do, but please be careful. It’s difficult to know what information is correct, and even if it is an official site, the information is very general, and can not know anything about you or the person you care for.

Also, people who add comments on forums tend to be people who have had bad experiences and so you can end up feeling things are worse than they actually are. We know it is not easy to speak to GPs and other Doctors, but building up good relationships with them is important, as they are in a position to give you the best information and support.

Looking after yourself

Lots of young carers have told us that it is really difficult to make time for themselves, and they sometimes try to protect the person they are caring for, by not telling them how they feel. But it is tough being a young person – there are lots of different things going on like school, friendships and family stuff – plus all those extra responsibilities that come with being a carer. It is a lot to deal with. Sometimes, you might end up at the bottom of the pile, or feel like you have to keep going even if you are not feeling great.

How do I feel?

People who are carers sometimes find that they can end up feeling down or a bit low themselves. It is understandable that looking after someone else has an emotional effect – it is not easy. On top of that, you might feel that you have got no one to talk to about your own life – a lot of young carers have told us they try to protect the person they are caring for, so they do not tell them if they feel bad. But, it is really important to ask for help and support – we all need it!

We all need to take time out to look after ourselves and make sure that we feel okay, otherwise our emotions can sometimes be affected. Most of us have times where we feel good emotionally or sometimes bad, and lots of things can affect us.



ACTIVITY



What sorts of words would you use to describe feeling good emotionally?

What about when we feel bad emotionally? What words would describe it?

Now – think about how you feel just now, and circle the words above which apply to you. They might be a mixture of good and bad emotions, and that's perfectly okay – most of us feel different things all mixed up together.

If you haven't been able to think of many words, turn the page – we've put some words and descriptions of moods and feelings – why not have a read and circle the ones which apply to you?

Rethink
Mental
Illness.

My plan
of action



My plan of action

What do I want to know?

When?

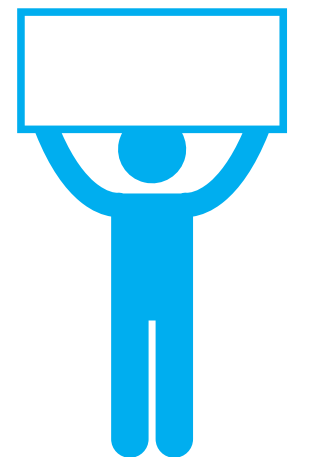
What things am I going to do to keep myself feeling well?

Who do I want to talk to?

When?

How will I know if I'm not feeling so good, emotionally?

Who can I ask for help?
(My support network)



Crying Anxious
 Open Hyper Confident
 Joyful Laughing
 Happy Strong
 Chatty Depressed Calm
 Stressed Down
 Capable Fed-up
 Friendly Playful
 Worried Cheerful Angry
 Weak Peaceful
 Alone Relaxed Sad

A bucket full of things going on

When you are a carer, you can have lots of extra things going on, or 'stresses', to deal with. It is tough being a young person already, and might feel tougher having a caring role. Imagine that the "stresses" that cause you stress or worry are like rain that fill up a bucket.

We've given Jason as an example so as you can see the sorts of things that are in his stress bucket

CASE STUDY

Jason is 12 years old and has cared for his Mum since he was 7.

He also has a young Sister, Molly, who helps him look after her, but he worries about her, too, as she is only 9. Jason and Molly's Mum has depression and sometimes is in bed a lot of the time. At the moment, she is doing quite well though.

Jason loves football, and is really good at it, so he is in the football team. He has some friends, but they do not understand what it is like for him, and he feels like he is a lot older than them. Jason's Dad works away a lot, and Jason tries not to tell him when things are bad for his Mum, as he doesn't want to worry him.

Jason's stress bucket:

No time for football training, Molly cries a lot, Mum is okay at the moment but waiting on a bad time coming is hard, hiding things from Dad, lack of sleep as try to get homework done late at night, don't know if Mum will ever get better, friends tease him.

Jason's ways of emptying his bucket (easing his stress):

He books in one of Mum's friends to come round when it is football practice time so as he can go; he runs a lot; he reads his ebook; he plays on his games console; he talks to his friends online when he can't see them so much; he plays with Molly and makes her laugh; he talks to his project worker about how he is feeling; he has joined a young carers' group and enjoys sharing experiences.



JASON'S STRESS BUCKET

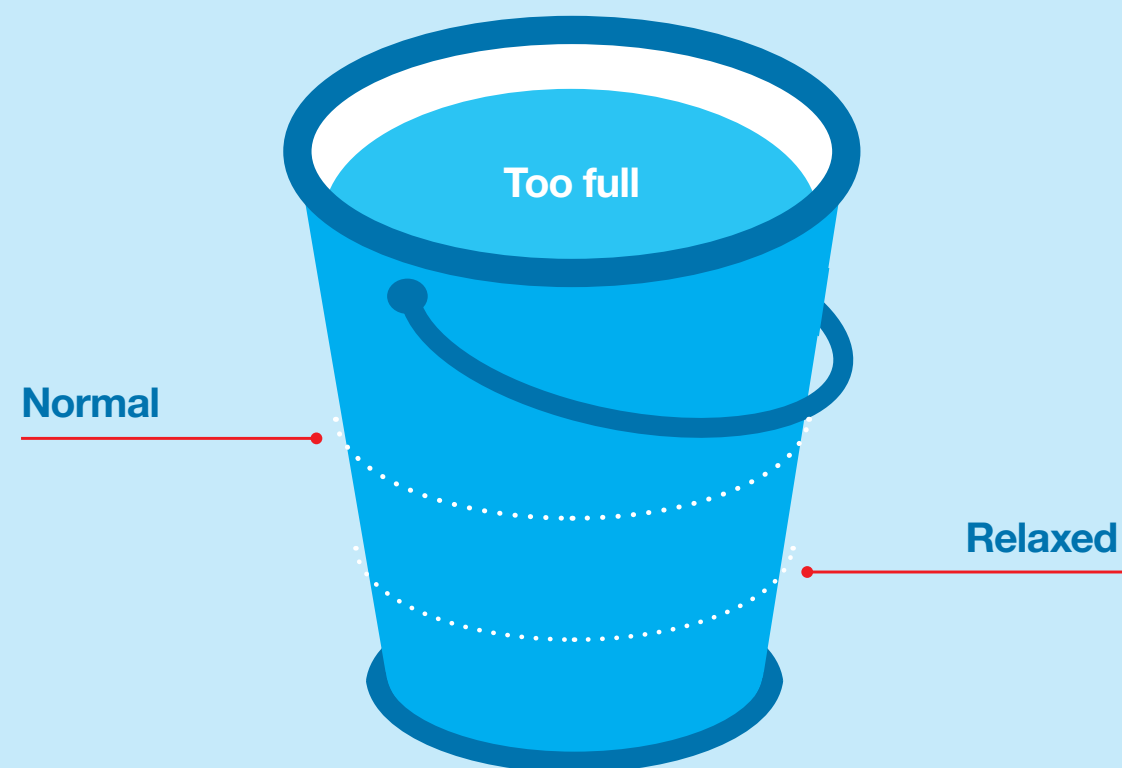


ACTIVITY

What things are in your stress bucket?



Scribble down as many things as you can think of that are affecting your own emotions or that you feel cause you stress:



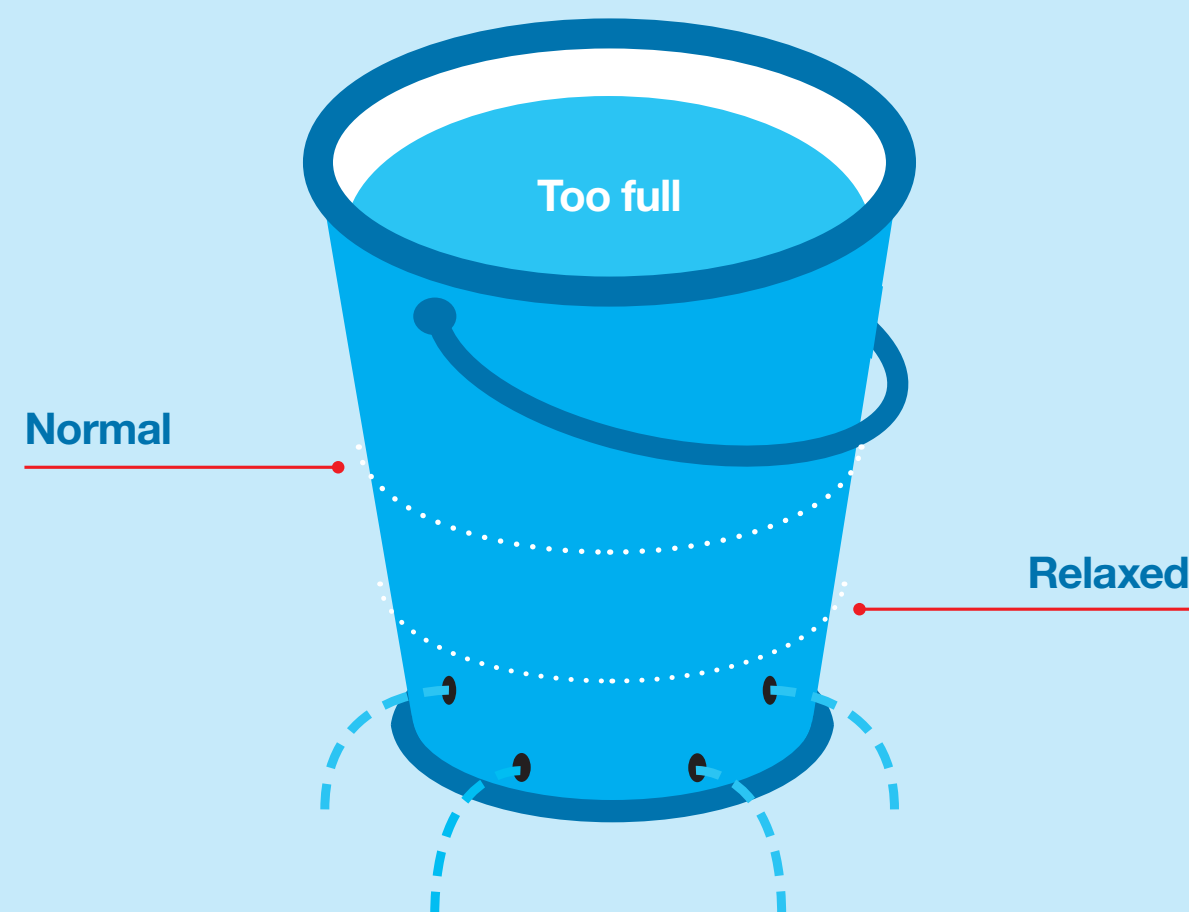
How does your bucket look? Does it need emptying out? We all need to empty out our stress buckets sometimes, or at least, get rid of some of it so as it is a lot less full! It is important to spend time doing this on a regular basis, and everyone's ways will be different. It is a bit like making holes in the bottom of your bucket by doing nice things!

Here are a few other things young people said they do to reduce their stresses (empty out their bucket):

- Listening to music
- Painting
- Seeing friends
- Playing with my pet
- Keeping a diary
- Talking to someone I trust
- Getting plenty of sleep
- Eating nice healthy food
- Running
- Playing football
- Gaming

ACTIVITY

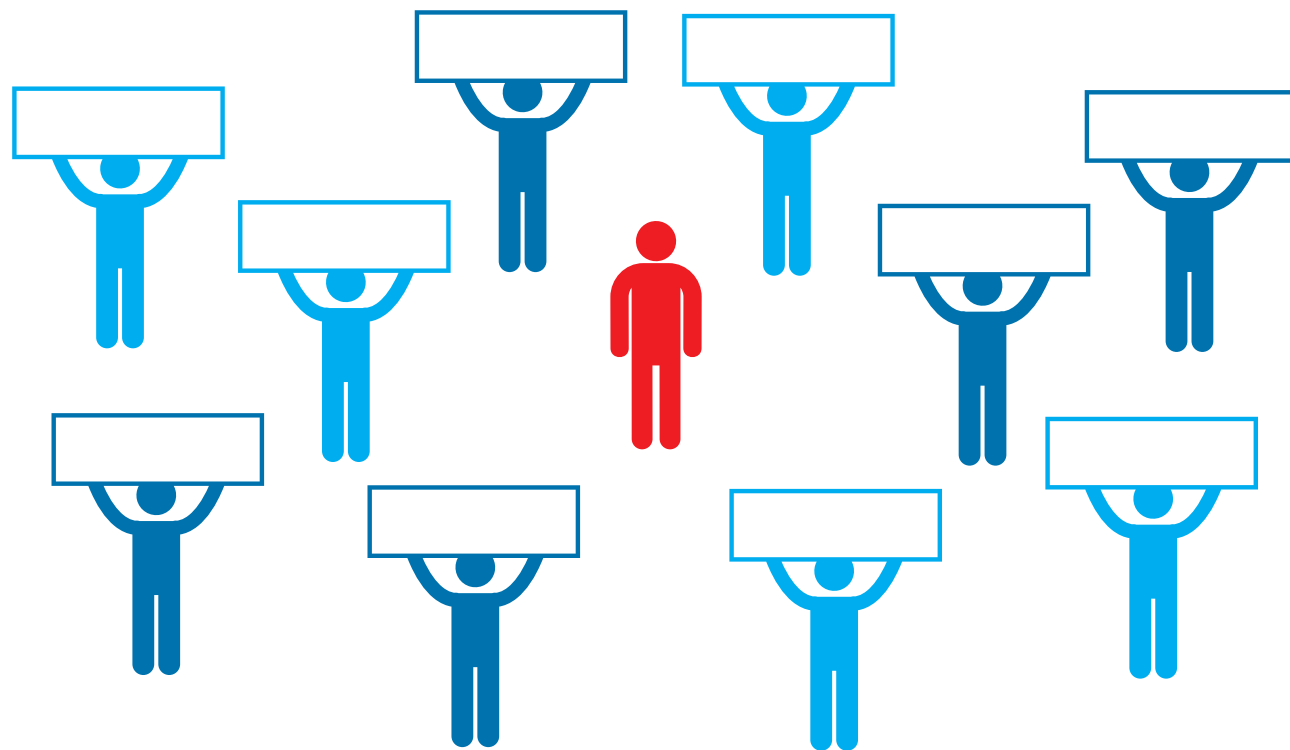
What things do you do to help you cope with stresses and difficulties (to empty out your bucket?)



What new things do you think you could try?

Why not have a chat with an adult you trust about how you could make time for some of these activities?

We all need help to empty out our stress bucket – Jason talks to lots of people including his Gran, his GP, his project worker, other young carers, his teacher, his Mum’s friend Jasmine and the school nurse. All of these people are part of Jason’s network – who’s in your network?



Make sure you also write down anyone who is not currently helping you, but who you could tell that you’re a young carer and ask for help. Put a tick by them so as you remember to make contact.

ACTIVITY

Myth Busters



Circle whether you think the following statements are true or false. The correct answers are at the bottom of page 17.

- Q1:** If you have mental health, you are ill. **TRUE OR FALSE**
- Q2:** People don’t get better if they’ve had a mental illness. **TRUE OR FALSE**
- Q3:** There is help out there for young carers. **TRUE OR FALSE**
- Q4:** The internet is a good place to talk about how I am feeling. **TRUE OR FALSE**
- Q5:** Google has really good medical information. **TRUE OR FALSE**

Things I wish I had known

Below are some of the things young carers said they wish they had known. Would you like to know any of the below? If so, ask a trusts adult about it like your project worker.

“I wish I was told what a young carer is, so as I could understand that I am one, and could look for support, but I couldn’t, because I didn’t know”.

“I wish I’d known what it means to be a young carer”.

“I wish I’d known that I can speak to people about problems, for example, teachers, Doctors, support workers”.

“I wish I’d known what help I could get”.

“I wish I’d known that there are a lot of people out there that are like me”.

We have developed a plan of action which comes along with this leaflet – you can use it to work out what are the things you want to find out, or do, next. Have a look at it. You can find it on the centre pages of this booklet.

Further support

Here are a few useful websites for more information and help. It would be good to look at these with one of the adults who supports you.

www.childline.org.uk or call 0800 1111

Childline provides online information for young people about all aspects of their life, and a helpline to call for support.

www.babble.carers.org

Babble is an online forum for young carers managed by the Carers' Trust.

www.nhs.uk/Conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/Pages/young-carers-rights.aspx

NHS information on what young carers' rights are, and information on how to get an assessment.

www.childrenssociety.org.uk/youngcarers

www.makewav.es/ycif/c/mentalhealth

Information on being a young carer and the Childrens' Society projects.

www.rethink.org/carers-family-friends/support-for-young-carers

Information from Rethink Mental Illness to support the emotional well-being of young carers.

young.people@rethink.org – please contact this email address if you have any further questions about this resource or an issue relating to being a young carer.

We hope you've found this resource useful.
It's worth keeping reflecting back over it to see how you feel at different times.

Remember that help is out there.

Myth Busters Answers

A1: FALSE: We all have mental health – and it changes – sometimes we feel really good emotionally, sometimes a bit down.

A2: FALSE: At least two-thirds of people who've had a mental illness get better, even if they might need to take medication.

A3: TRUE: As a young carer, there is support for you. You could start by talking to your school or your GP, your project worker, or a trusted adult you know.

A4: FALSE: We all get really tempted to say how we feel on social networking sites, but remember that it's not a good way to get help, and what we write can stay there forever.

A5: FALSE: There are some sites which will have some accurate information (such as the NHS sites) but it's very general, and isn't about your own situation. There are also lots of sites that have untrue information on them, or tell one story about one person, and which can be very scary and unhelpful.



**Leading the way to a better
quality of life for everyone
affected by severe mental illness.**

For further information
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