

ABC life support

First aid training for all

Young Men and Mental Health

In adult diagnosed mental illness, around 75% of problems will have an origin in the teenage years. An incredible 50% will begin even sooner, before the age of 14. Incidents of both self-reported and diagnosable mental ill health amongst young people are increasing and the provision of professional support cannot meet demand.

As with adult mental illness, the type and frequency of mental health disorders differs across age and gender. Broadly speaking, more boys than girls are diagnosed with a behavioural disorder like ADHD or an Autistic spectrum disorder, whereas girls are more likely to experience an emotional problem like anxiety or depression. As with adult mental health, the differences are complex, and factors such as gender stereotypes, stigma and societal attitudes to mental health are almost certainly distorting the picture.

Young people face many new challenges to their mental health that may be hard for older generations to comprehend. The rapid development of digital technology and social media has created virtual worlds that have connected people globally. Whilst there is much to celebrate from this evolution, problems like exploitation, cyber bullying, and easy access to negative and damaging content have accompanied it and can be hard to resist and manage.

When supporting young people with their mental health, it is important not to dismiss their experience as being typical or trivial. Attributing struggles to hormones, over-reacting, lack of “resilience” or “just a phase that will pass” risks invalidating their suffering and shutting down the communication, as well as potentially oversimplifying what could be something far more complex. Young people may not always want to talk to us or may struggle to express themselves in a way that would naturally trigger our compassion. Looking beyond the emotion to the underlying pain can be a useful way to depersonalise an emotional outburst and find our empathy. Ultimately, young people need to know that we are there for them, unconditionally, whenever they are ready.