

EBPU Evidence Based Practice Unit

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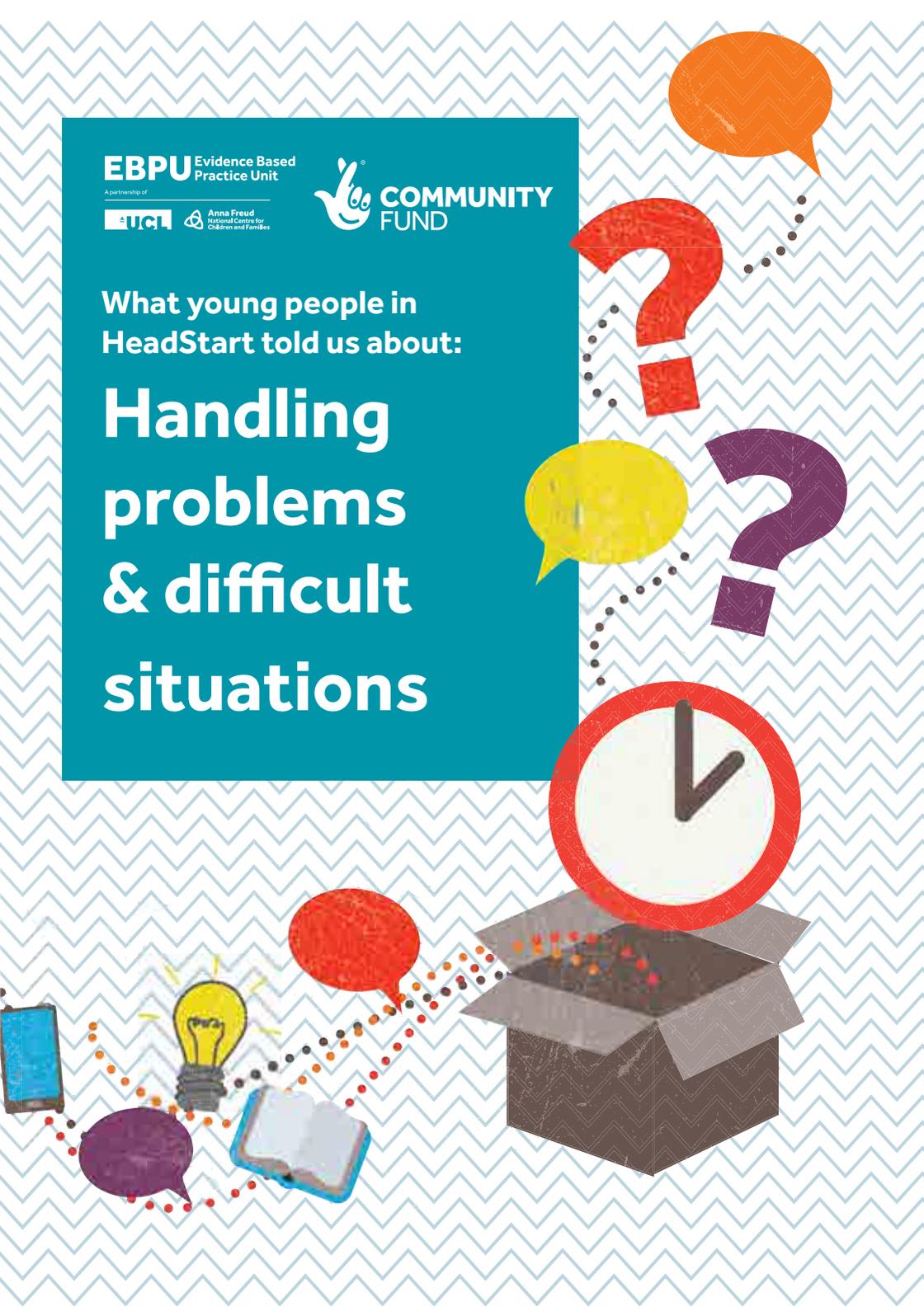
Anna Freud
National Centre for
Children and Families



**COMMUNITY
FUND**

What young people in
HeadStart told us about:

Handling problems & difficult situations



What is HeadStart?

HeadStart will spend the next five years looking at how to help young people with their wellbeing and how to stop young people from developing serious mental health issues. To do this, HeadStart is providing different types of help and support to young people in schools, online and where they live.

HeadStart is happening in six areas across England: Hull, Wolverhampton, Newham, Cornwall, Blackpool and Kent. The six areas are making sure that young people are part of the whole project, because young people have lots of knowledge about what works and what they need.

The HeadStart Learning Team is a group of researchers from the Evidence Based Practice Unit (UCL and the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families), the University Of Manchester, the Child Outcomes Research Consortium (CORC) and Common Room. The Learning Team researches the ways HeadStart is supporting young people and whether this support is helping. They produce a range of reports and messages about what the research shows.

This report is based on findings from interviews with young people and was coproduced with young people from the Wolverhampton HeadStart Programme. We thank them for their work on this.

Booklet by
Amy Feltham and
Kate Martin.

Derived from
*HeadStart Year 1:
National Qualitative
Evaluation Findings*
by Emily Stapley
and Jess Deighton.

What is this booklet about?

We wanted to find out how young people handle problems and difficult situations in their lives. We spoke to 63 young people who had either received support from HeadStart or could receive it in the future. We asked them about:

- Feelings and emotions
- School
- Home
- Family and friends
- Things they found difficult
- Things that helped them feel better

This helped us to find out about:

- What young people found hard
- Where they went for help
- Things they did to help themselves

This booklet explains what the young people told us.

This booklet talks about young people's experiences of some difficult issues, like self harm, bullying and family problems. If you find anything covered here upsetting, speak to an adult you can trust like someone at home or school. You can also find a list of other support options on page 25 of this booklet.



About

The HeadStart programme will run for

5
years

£56
million

National Lottery funded programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund.

The aim is to explore and test new ways to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 10 to 16 and prevent serious mental health issues from developing.

6

local-authority-led HeadStart partnerships in Blackpool, Cornwall, Hull, Kent, Newham and Wolverhampton.

HeadStart programmes work with local young people, schools, families, charities, community and public services to make young people's mental health and wellbeing everybody's business.

63
young
people aged
9 to 11
years

were interviewed by researchers from the Learning Team.

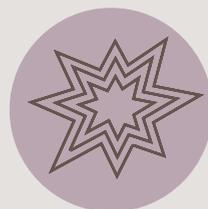
What are young people's problems?



Fights and arguments with their peers could cause distress and worry for young people.



Fights and arguments with their parents and siblings could also cause distress and were something that young people worried about.



Young people described experiencing explosive angry outbursts, and talked about their worries and fears.

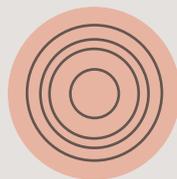
Young people also described their academic struggles, such as such as difficulties with particular subjects or with behaviour at school.

How do young people deal with their problems?



Young people described the many ways in which they coped with difficult feelings and situations.

This included positive thinking and activities e.g. exercise and reading. Also, disengaging from problems, standing up for themselves in arguments, or accepting difficult situations.



But coping strategies have limitations, e.g. when a problem is too big for them to deal with themselves.

What did we learn about young people's support?



Parents, friends, siblings and school staff are important individuals to provide comfort, advice and distraction.



Some young people also spoke about their pets helping to comfort or distract them from their problems.



But some said they did not like speaking to others as they were worried about the consequences of sharing.

What did young people think of HeadStart?



The majority of the people involved in HeadStart described the positive impact it had on them.

Positives included having someone to talk to and receiving advice and learning strategies to deal with difficult emotions and situations.

Young people who, e.g. did not see themselves as having any major problems or who did not understand the purpose of the activities that they were involved in, struggled to see the positives as clearly as others.

What does this mean?

The findings have implications for the people working as part of HeadStart and for others supporting young people's wellbeing.



Young people need someone available to talk to about their problems or difficult situations when and if they need to.



Where possible young people need time to do the things that relax them, that they enjoy, or that can make them feel better.

What did young people tell us they found difficult?

- Coping with difficult feelings
- Fights and arguments with friends or others
- Issues at home
- Some subjects and situations at school

What did young people tell us they found difficult?

Difficult feelings

Young people told us about some of the feelings and emotions they found difficult.

Feeling angry

Young people talked about having explosions of anger. This meant they did things like:

- Storm off
- Punch or kick people and things
- Shout.

They told us that getting angry could be caused by:

- Being told off at school or at home
- Having fights with their friends.

Young people told us that when they got angry this could mean:

- They would sometimes be told off
- They could upset their parents
- Other people sometimes got hurt
- It was hard to do their work at school.

One young person said:

"He said stuff about my family... that upsets me... the most, and that.

So what happens when you get upset?

I get angry. And like then from sadness it turns up, ends up turning into rage, I get really angry. Yeah, I could... do something stupid when I'm angry, but eventually once I've calmed down it's just sad again."



Feeling worried

Young people also spoke about being worried or fearful. They were worried about all sorts of things, like:

- Exams
- Friendships
- Important people in their lives
- Keeping safe.



Not feeling confident

Young people also said that they were shy or didn't always believe in themselves. This made some things difficult, like:

- Making new friends
- Asking for help
- Answering questions in class.

Hurting themselves

A small number of young people spoke about hurting themselves. Some told us that they did this because:

- They needed to take out their difficult feelings on themselves
- Things that their friends said or did made it feel like a good idea.

One young person said:

"Sometimes when I'm with people that I don't really know, I'm not really confident and I don't really say much 'cause I don't want to embarrass myself or something. And I, or I don't want them to... not like me... 'cause I want everyone to like me."

One young person said:

"I didn't know what else to do, I was getting so mad. I just... so... I was feeling angry, I was feeling stressed... and like, I didn't know what to do anymore."

What did young people tell us they found difficult?

Their friends and other young people

A lot of the young people told us that they sometimes had problems with their friends and other young people.

Having fights

About two-thirds of young people told us they had fights with their friends and other young people. Sometimes the fights meant:

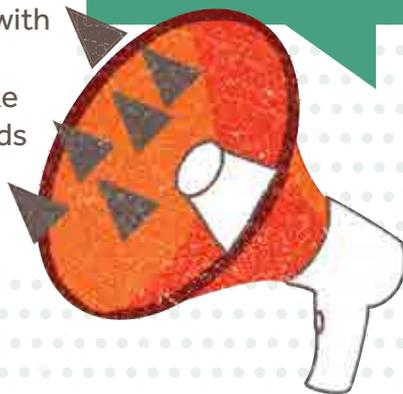
- Talking with or shouting at other people
- Kicking, punching or hurting other people
- Being kicked, punched or hurt.

There were lots of reasons why the young people had fights, like:

- Mix-ups with friends, like thinking their friend was ignoring them when the friend wasn't
- Feeling cross that friends were playing with other people
- Friends doing things they didn't like, like showing off or being nasty to other friends or family
- Friends talking about them behind their backs.

One young person said:

"If someone's rude to me... or if someone like says something about me, which no one really says anything about me, but if [they're] just joking or something that will make me upset... upset 'cause, I'm quite sensitive, so, like, if someone says something... and they don't mean it, it'll probably still make me a bit upset."



Sometimes young people thought these fights were no big deal, but some young people found them very upsetting. They were more upset when they felt like they were being bullied.

Young people said that bullying meant:

- Being called names
- Another young person saying they were going to do something bad to them
- Being wound up
- Telling other young people things that were not true.

Not having enough friends

Young people also mentioned that they didn't always have as many friends as they wanted.

This sometimes made them feel:

- Lonely
- Bored
- Upset.

Sometimes they thought that they didn't have enough friends because:

- They were shy
- They got very worried around other people
- They found moving to a new place or school hard at first.

One young person said:

"I haven't got many friends in school, I've got one or two. I'm waiting for September 'cause all my friends come up from primary school. 'Cause I made friends with all the Year 4s and 5s, so, not the Year 6s. So I moved up and they stayed down in primary. I should've made friends with the Year 6s."



What did young people tell us they found difficult?

Home

Young people told us how sometimes things were hard at home.

Having fights at home

Young people told us they had fights with the adults at home. Some young people thought these happened very often or that they and the adults got very angry. A small number of young people said they got hit or slapped.

Young people also said they had fights with their brothers or sisters. Some of them said this felt normal and not a big deal. Some other young people said it made them very upset or very angry.

One young person said:

"When I'm in my mum's house, I'm a completely different person. I'm always sad 'cause there's always something to argue over."



The adults at home finding things hard

Some of the young people we spoke to said their mum and dad didn't live together. This wasn't always hard for young people, but sometimes was hard when:

- Their mum and dad were still angry with each other
- They had to live in more than one place
- Their mum and dad told them different things
- They didn't get to see their mum or dad as much as they wanted to.

Some young people found other things made them feel worried or sad, or made it hard for them to sleep, like:

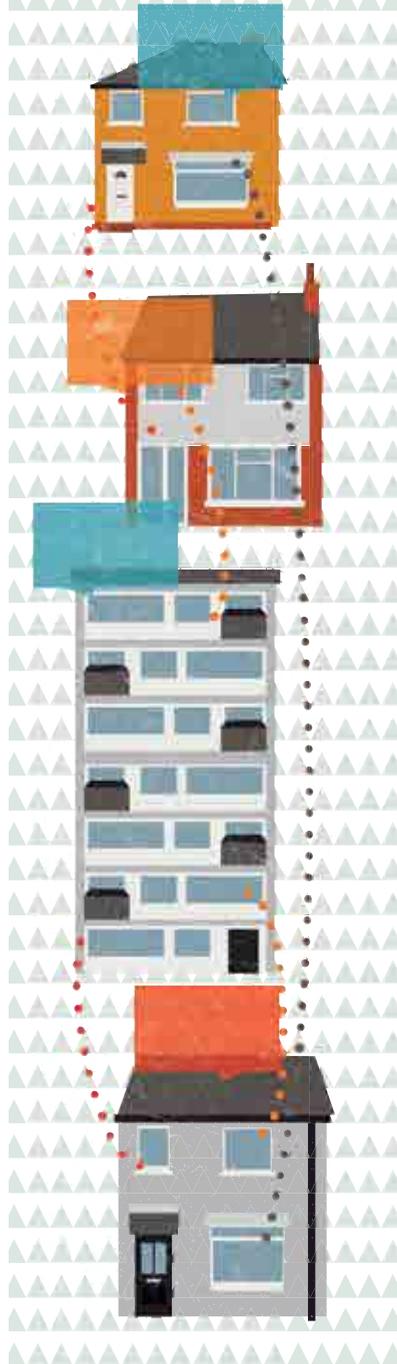
- The adults at home being ill
- There not being enough money
- Family or pets dying
- The adults at home having to work a lot.

Some young people said they wanted to spend more time with their mum or dad. Sometimes their parents didn't have enough time or didn't live in the same place which made this hard.

Problems with where they live

Sometimes, the place they lived could make things hard for the young people. This was because:

- The adults at home argued with their neighbours
- They felt scared of the people living around them
- There were bullies or gangs nearby
- It was noisy at night.



What did young people tell us they found difficult?

School

Finding it hard to keep up

Some young people said that they found difficult lessons a good challenge. Others found them hard when:

- They were worried about the adults at home being disappointed
- They didn't feel as clever as others
- They were scared about asking a teacher for help
- They felt like they had too much schoolwork.

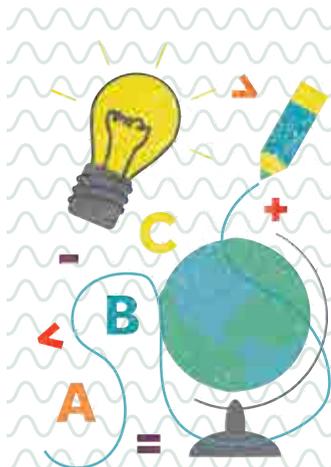
Problems in class

Some young people found it hard to pay attention in class because:

- Others were distracting them
- It was hard to sit still
- It was hard to focus.

Some young people said that they got in trouble in class, for things like:

- Fighting
- Messing around
- Talking to other young people.



One young person said:

"Because sometimes I talk a lot, yeah, and I talk to my friends a lot. And in classrooms, yeah, when we're learning, yeah, I get distracted. Because people are getting my attention."

They said this could mean:

- They were given detention
- They were put on report card
- They were told they may have to leave the school.

Teachers

Some young people felt like they were getting in trouble a lot because teachers expected them to be misbehaving even when they weren't, for example, when they had a reputation for this.

Sometimes young people found lessons with certain teachers hard because:

- They didn't like how the teacher taught the lessons
- They felt like the teacher didn't understand what they needed.

One young person said:

"It would just be a surprise test every Friday... and then he makes you shout out how much you got on the test... and... I don't like shouting out my answers, because sometimes [I] just get zero and stuff."



What did young people tell us helped?

- Help from other people
- Helping themselves feel better

What did young people tell us helped?

HeadStart

Some young people said they had had help from HeadStart. Young people spoke about things like having a peer mentor, learning as a group about how to deal with difficult feelings and situations, and having an adult to talk to when things were tough.

Enjoying HeadStart

Lots of them found the activities that they did as part of HeadStart fun, enjoyable or exciting. They liked:

- Playing games
- Being part of something that made things better.

Finding HeadStart helpful

Most of the young people who were part of HeadStart felt like it had been good for them. This was because:

- They felt like they were now more able to talk about difficult things
- They had someone to talk to
- They learnt more ways to cope
- They learnt how to manage things they found difficult
- They felt more confident
- They made new friends.

One young person said:

"I guess it was just interesting because it seemed like such a grown-up thing. Like it seems very official and important and it seems to have a very big impact and a lot of weight on it and it just seemed... and it just generally seemed cool as well because you just get like to do these fun activities asking people about stuff."

Finding HeadStart people helpful

Young people said their peer mentors were

- Nice
- Someone they could trust
- Someone who understood them.

This was sometimes because they were about the same age and had the same sorts of interests and experiences of difficult things.

Young people also said the adults involved in HeadStart were helpful. They said they were kind and they could talk to them about difficult things privately.

Young people said HeadStart was good because:

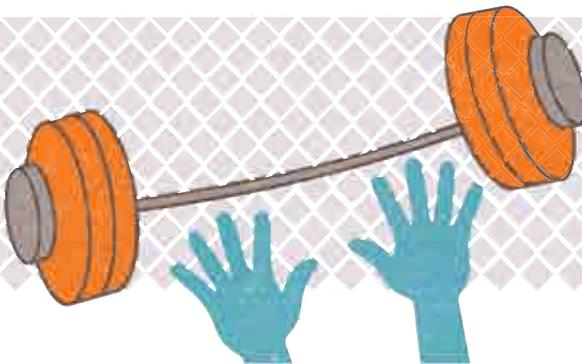
- It helped them understand feelings and what to do about them
- They got advice about keeping on top of their work
- People helped them sort out fights with friends
- It helped them know what to do about bullies
- It helped them think good things about themselves
- They knew who to go to with problems
- They felt like they could be themselves.

One young person said:

"What sorts of things did you learn about how to handle being worried? I learnt to stop, to stop exaggerating because it might not, you might be making it out to be... I can't think of the sentence... you might be, you might be over-exaggerating ... so, you think like 'Oh all this is going to happen', but when you go you realise that it was simple all along."

One young person said:

"I release that, the, the weight off my shoulders, I just tell [my mentor] what happened. Like, I have someone to tell if I don't want to necessarily tell my mum, I can tell either [my mentor] or my friends."



When HeadStart wasn't helpful

Sometimes young people said HeadStart wasn't that helpful. This was because:

- They didn't feel like they had problems they needed help with
- They had other people to help them
- They hadn't been part of HeadStart very long
- They didn't see the point of the help
- They found it hard to remember what had been said.

Young people said it could be more helpful if:

- Their peer mentor stayed the same
- They understood why they were doing things as part of HeadStart
- They had activities which helped more with specific issues, like trusting others
- They didn't have to miss lessons.



What did young people tell us helped?

Help from other people

Teachers and other adults at school

Most of the young people we spoke to said teachers were good at helping with issues at school like bullying and fighting with friends.

Some young people said that they had one adult in school they would go to if they were finding things hard, who they could talk to about their feelings.

Some young people said there was a teacher who helped by believing they could do things, which helped them feel more confident.

But teachers did not always help. Sometimes this was because:

- Young people didn't want to get into trouble themselves
- Sometimes teachers took the other person's side in an argument
- Teachers couldn't always stop bullies
- Teachers were sometimes too busy to help.

One young person said:

"Maybe that they need some more, like, places set up around the school. They've got one for breaktime and lunch, but I mean like... they just need like more places around where there will be some teachers that can help a bit, like, a lot."

Telling school about bullying

Telling school about other problems, like when the young person found it hard not to get very angry

Sorting out arguments with their brothers and sisters

Giving them advice about what to do when they argued with friends or were bullied at school

The adults at home

Most young people said they could talk to the adults at home about their lives and problems, and get advice about what to do.

Sometimes the adults at home could help by:

But sometimes young people said they didn't talk to the adults at home about problems. This was because

- They didn't want to be told off
- They didn't want to worry their parents
- They didn't want to upset their parents.

Brothers and sisters

Young people told us that their brothers and sisters sometimes helped them feel better, even though they were sometimes annoying. They did this by:

- Standing up for them in arguments with bullies or their parents

One young person said:

"If something was worrying me that like that much, like I can't even think, I think I would definitely talk to somebody like, anybody that I can talk to. Like, obviously I would talk to my dad, like I would tell him that it was worrying me, I just don't think he would like... relate as much, like, as my mum, or my nana."

- Helping them to talk to parents or teachers about what they needed
- Listening to them talk about problems
- Helping with homework.

Sometimes brothers and sisters were not helpful. This was mostly when they made a big deal out of problems or gave bad advice.

Young people also told us their pets were helpful. They could be comforting, distracting, and good company.

Friends and other young people

Most of the young people we spoke to said friends were good at helping them with problems, by being there to cheer them up or give them advice when:

- They had a bad day
- They fell out with friends or family
- They were being bullied.

Friends helped by:

- Being someone they could trust to talk to when they didn't want to talk to adults
- Noticing when something was wrong
- Distracting them
- Cheering them up.

Young people said it was important to have enough friends so that if they argued with one friend they had others to talk to and play with.

But they sometimes worried that their friends might share private things with others.



What did young people tell us helped?

Helping themselves feel better

Doing things

Many of the young people we spoke to told us about things they could do to help themselves feel better, like:

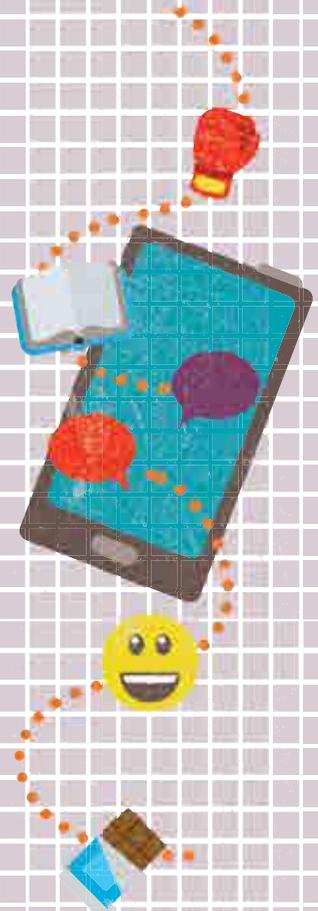
- Thinking positively
- Doing sports like swimming, dancing or boxing
- Eating treats
- Reading
- Using their phone to play games or talk to friends.

But this didn't always help. Young people said sometimes the problems were too big for doing things to help. Sometimes they needed to talk to someone or wait for the feeling to pass.

Ignoring problems

Young people also talked about walking away from problems or blocking them out. They tried to think about or do something else.

Ignoring people who were annoying them like bullies and brothers and sisters sometimes worked too.



Sometimes spending time alone was helpful when they felt angry or sad. This helped because:

- It gave them time to think
- They had peace and quiet
- They were able to leave hard situations
- They had time to calm themselves down.

Hiding problems

Some young people said they tried to hide their problems. This was sometimes because:

- They didn't want to make things worse
- They didn't want other people to think they were weak
- They didn't want other people to worry
- They didn't want to talk about the problems
- They felt like they could manage without help.

Other things young people tried

- Some young people told us that they got used to dealing with their problems. They learnt to carry on anyway.
- Some young people tried understanding why a difficult thing was happening.
- Some young people tried defending themselves in fights. They worried that this sometimes got them told off or hurt other people.



Conclusion

The most common problem that young people told us about was having fights and arguments. Some young people found these easy to manage, but others found them upsetting. Sometimes this was part of being bullied, sometimes they were arguments or fights with friends or family.

They also told us that other things could be hard, like:

- Their mum and dad getting divorced or being ill
- Important people or pets dying
- Not having enough money at home.

These things were very hard for some young people, but not as hard for others.

Young people also told us about having problems like:

- Getting very angry
- Being very worried, sometimes for a long time
- Finding schoolwork hard
- Finding it hard not to get in trouble at school.

A lot of the time, these different problems could make each other worse.



They told us about some things they could do to help themselves. They also told us that sometimes they needed some help from others (e.g. HeadStart, parents, friends, teachers).

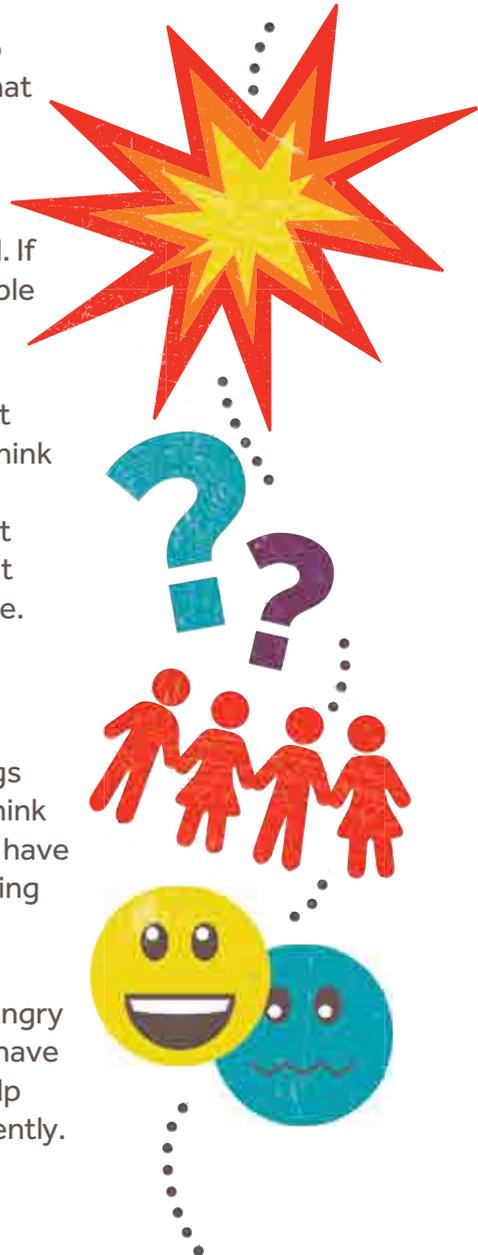
Support from others helped by:

- Giving them someone to talk to
- Getting advice and comfort, or being cheered up
- Making them feel more able to talk about their problems
- Learning ways to cope with hard feelings and situations
- Making them feel more confident.



What does this mean?

- Having someone to talk to was really important. Adults might be able to help young people by checking with them that they have someone they can talk to.
- Young people may already get lots of support from friends, family and school. If young people need more help, the people offering help should make use of this.
- Young people are good at knowing what helps them feel better. Schools could think about giving young people time out to do these things when they have difficult feelings. Young people could share what works for them with other young people.
- Young people who had hard things happen, like their mum and dad getting divorced, didn't always find their feelings unmanageable. Adults might want to think about helping young people when they have difficult feelings, not just when something hard has happened.
- Boys were more likely to have difficult angry feelings, while girls were more likely to have difficult worried feelings. This might help adults work out how to help them differently.





Where can I find support?

Childline: 0800 1111

The Samaritans: 116 123

On My Mind: annafreud.org/on-my-mind

The Mix: themix.org.uk



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