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**R U**  
right in the  
**head?**

# R U right in the head?

You might think being healthy is simply about being fit and looking good. But don't forget about the importance of being "right in the head".

This booklet is for lads aged 11-16 and aims to help you better understand about being healthy in your head.

Being "right in the head" means feeling good about yourself, knowing what you like and respecting yourself – and letting your feelings out rather than hiding them. This is very important because the way you think about yourself can have a big effect on your health.

## Stuff that affects UR head

There are lots of pressures on you as you grow up – like *school work, bullies, alcohol, drugs, relationships, your mates slugging you... sex!*

Or maybe you don't like the way you look. Everyone's body changes between 11 and 16 – so it's important to remember you're not odd – you're normal! Wouldn't it be boring if everybody was the same?

Sometimes things can do your head in and if you don't know how to get it sorted you feel crap about yourself – but that's OK. Everybody feels like this sometimes and you can ask for and get help.

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## ...from boy... to man

In our society there is no 'moment' when you become a man – so it's hard to know what's expected from you.

At this time you are going through loads of physical and emotional changes:

- ✱ Hormones are popping making you grow quicker and your body change.
- ✱ You may have zits for a while or notice hairs appearing around your face or your balls!
- ✱ The things you care about and think about are also different and you don't want to be treated like a kid.
- ✱ You will think a lot more about sex – but don't panic – everybody does that at your age!
- ✱ Some lads will fancy other lads – these feelings may change or they may not, but both are normal.

It's weird, but not many adults talk to lads your age about these things.

**What people expect from you also changes as you get older.** Parents may think you should be "more mature" – but sometimes that's not the way you feel.

At times you may feel confused or uncertain about things – you may be down about yourself or feel under pressure – but it's important to know that you're changing and you're still learning. All this takes time – and is a natural part of the journey from boy to man!

## Being a man – what's that?

Some people think that being a man means being

- macho
- strong
- able to cope with all problems
- tough
- fearless

But, **lads** who feel pressure to act tough all the time don't talk to anybody about their problems and they have to cope alone – which is not good for your health.

So, do you think men shouldn't cry or talk about their problems? If you think they shouldn't – think again! All young men need to be confident enough to talk about how they feel. This is not a sign of weakness – it's a strength! It'll also help you to stay right in the head.

**Being a man is not about being tough. It's about:**

- being comfortable with who you are
- facing your problems
- not hiding your feelings
- using self-control rather than fighting
- asking for support when you need it
- taking responsibility

'Being macho is how you act - it's not who you are!'

# Being a man... it's a risky business!

Did U know?

*Men die five years earlier than women!*

This has a lot to do with lifestyles and the fact that **lads take risks with their health.**

Research shows that young men...

- are less likely to wear a seat belt in a car
- are less likely to go to the doctor when sick
- are more likely to trip, fall or bump into things
- are more likely to abuse alcohol and other substances and get involved in crime
- are more likely to smash things up rather than talk about their feelings.

Studies also show that...

- 99% of people in prison are men
- young men are four times more likely to die from suicide than young women
- young gay men are more likely to commit suicide than young straight men
- many suicidal lads have experienced bullying.

It is important that you think seriously about risk-taking behaviour and **have the confidence to say no to the things that could cause you harm** – like taking drugs or alcohol, smoking, joyriding, or feeling pressurised to have sex.

Remember...

Taking risks is not bad in itself. It's only by taking certain risks that you achieve things in life – no one would ever have climbed a mountain if they had never left the ground! Achieving things can involve risk. Taking risks can be exciting and good fun – but make sure that you are comfortable with the things you do – and most of all that it's safe!



# Feeling good about URself

Being healthy in your head is all about how you feel about yourself and how comfortable you are as a person.

Remember that you are unique – there's no one in the world like you! Everyone has different skills and abilities and talents and no one's brilliant at everything.

**It's OK to be successful but it's OK to make mistakes too!**

## Stress!

Most young people talk about being stressed or hassled... You may feel hassled about:

- bullying
- school work or exams
- a friend or relative who is ill or has died
- family stuff
- your weight or the way you look
- getting in trouble with police
- moving house or changing school
- bad experiences from the past
- your sexuality or pressure to lose your virginity
- problems with your girlfriend
- being attracted to other lads
- drugs
- having no money

## Chain reaction

**Stress is a fact of life that affects everybody – it's normal.** Not all stress is bad.

- Stress can be a good thing that drives you on.
- Without stress life would be boring.

BUT too much stress can seriously damage your health. Too much stress = DISTRESS

## R U OK?

**Signs of distress are:**

- feeling anxious or sad
- falling out with people
- fighting for no reason
- being a bully
- nail-biting
- poor appetite
- not being able to sleep

So, what's happening? This is just your body's emergency signals letting you know when you are worried or anxious, sending adrenaline into your blood causing all sorts of physical reactions.

It's important to believe in yourself and do things to overcome the problem. **Don't try to be perfect and don't bottle up the way you feel.**

# How to have less stress

Some days you wake up feeling good and happy enough with life. Other days you feel low and dread going out – you feel crap about yourself and your relationships with others. This is normal.

But there are things you can do to make sure you don't get too down or depressed. Why not try some of these:

## Do...

- try and relax – read a magazine or book, watch TV, go to the cinema, go bowling, listen to music (it helps you wind UR neck in)
- something creative (draw, paint, doodle, join a group that interests you)
- something active (like play football)
- talk to a mate/girlfriend/family member
- shout, yell or cry!
- play computer games
- try to get plenty of sleep
- see page 14 for other ideas

**Just chill!**

## Don't...

- give up hope
- give in to pressure to smoke – tobacco is highly addictive
- take alcohol or drugs – and never mix them – it'll only make things worse
- keep it a secret – talk to someone about how you feel – a mate, family member or someone you can trust...
- be alone too much
- stop eating – you need energy to cope with problems – but try not to overeat either!
- be embarrassed about your emotions – sometimes it's OK to be angry – just let people know how you feel
- lose control of your temper.

# R U a good mate?

## What about ye?

Being a good mate means more than just hanging around together. It means listening to each others' problems as well as having a laugh.

Talking – can help you with your feelings and help you sort things out. So if you have a problem, talk to a mate you can trust.

Remember, sometimes your mates might need someone to talk to. It takes courage to **listen** to other people's problems and be prepared to help them – you may not have all the answers but at least you can share their problems.

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## A good mate is someone who...

- listens
- cares
- accepts your point of view
- gives you respect
- sticks up for you
- keeps a secret
- can see the funny side of things
- can let you be sad and not laugh at you

## A good mate does not...

- let you down
- give you too much grief
- tout on you
- spread rumours about you
- put you under pressure to do things you don't want to do – like take drugs, have sex, steal, go joyriding or skive off school
- slabber or talk about you behind your back.

So, if your head's fried... talk about it!

*If you feel you're not ready to talk to someone, text a mate, email a friend or see the next page for other ideas.*

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# Help!

*If you're not feeling right in UR head – or if you want information on other stuff why not check out these contacts and websites? 0800 and 0808 numbers are free from landlines so will not appear on phone bills but you may be charged if calling from a mobile, and it may appear on the bill.*

## ChildLine

ChildLine is the free 24-hour helpline for children and young people up to the age of 18. You can call the helpline about any problem, at any time – day or night. Counsellors are there to help you find ways to sort things out. ChildLine is confidential – which means they won't tell anyone about your call unless you want them to talk to somebody for you, or you are in danger.

Tel: 0800 1111

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

## National Drugs Helpline

The National Drugs Helpline is a free and confidential 24-hour telephone service that offers advice and information for those who are concerned, or have questions, about drugs. The service is available to anyone.

Tel: 0800 77 66 00

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## Samaritans

Samaritans provides confidential, emotional support to anyone in crisis, 24 hours a day. Trained volunteers listen, without judgement and without telling you what to do, and try to help you think things through.

Tel: 08457 90 90 90 (local call rate)

Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

[www.samaritans.org.uk](http://www.samaritans.org.uk)

## Youthline

Youthline is a telephone helpline run by Contact Youth. They provide free and confidential counselling to young people in Northern Ireland aged 11 to 25.

Tel: 0808 808 8000

[www.contactyouth.org](http://www.contactyouth.org)

## [www.niyouthinfo.org](http://www.niyouthinfo.org)

This youth information service is an information portal for young people in Northern Ireland. Inside you'll find useful info on a range of issues affecting young people today.

## [www.heads-away-just-say.com](http://www.heads-away-just-say.com)

This local website for young people has information on stuff like alcohol, drugs, bereavement, relationships, peer pressure, bullying, exam pressure, self-harm, depression, sex, violence and minding others.

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**'Sometimes life is hard on you and you may feel alone - you're not!'**



**Health  
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