

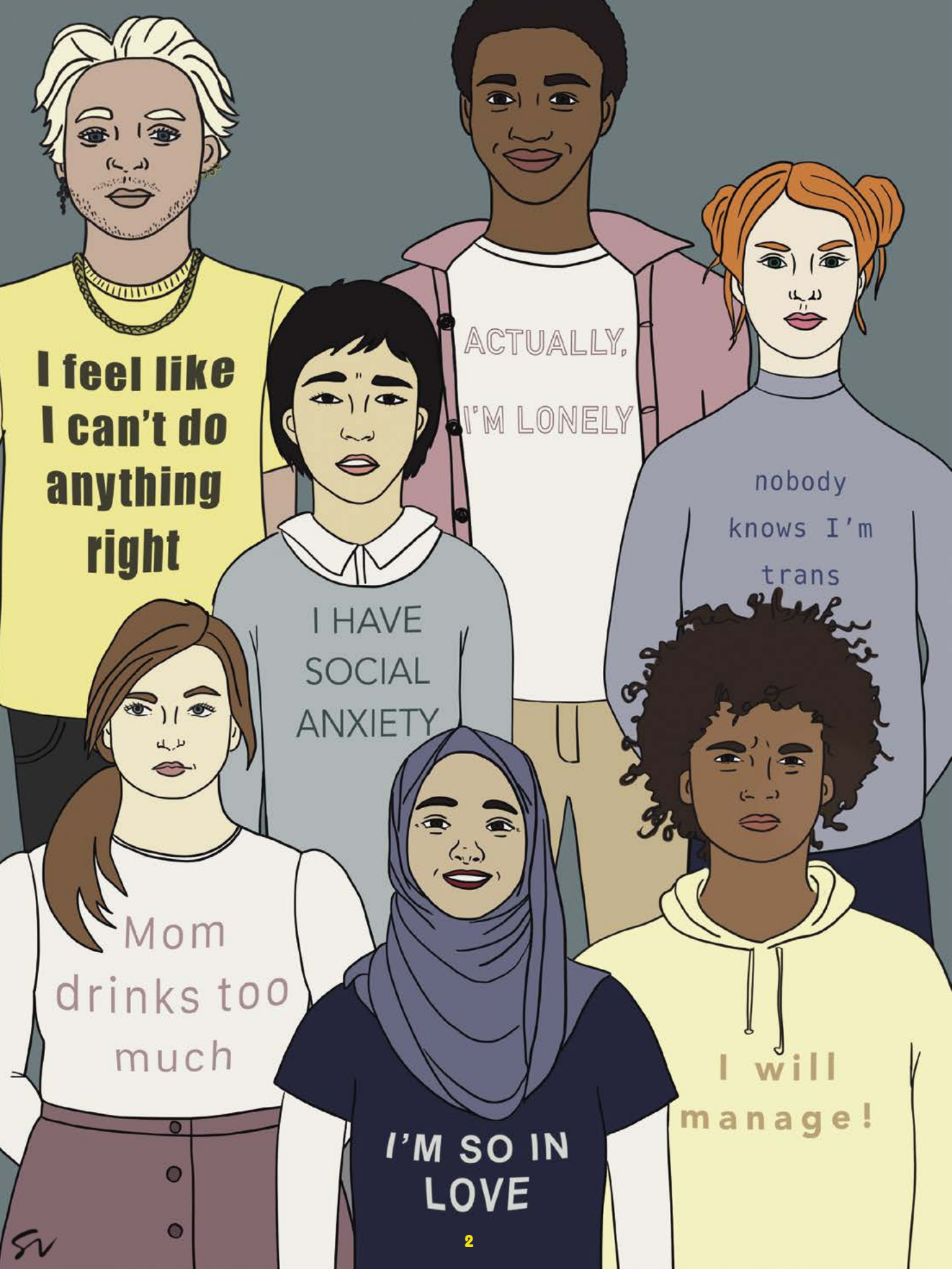


# VIP

# Talk About It

Student Booklet





**I feel like  
I can't do  
anything  
right**

ACTUALLY,  
I'M LONELY

nobody  
knows I'm  
trans

I HAVE  
SOCIAL  
ANXIETY

Mom  
drinks too  
much

**I'M SO IN  
LOVE**

**I will  
manage!**



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Anna språk/Different language/Eará giella?

This booklet is available in Norwegian (Bokmål and Nynorsk), English and Northern Sami. Contact your teacher if you would like a copy of this booklet in another language.

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**Design and print:** Byråservice AS

**Photos:** Beathe Schieldrop (pgs. 1–4, 6–8, 10–11, 13–18, 20–21, 23–26, 37, 44), Tine Poppe (pgs. 8–9, 12, 24–25, 30, 33–36, 38, 40), Colourbox: (pgs. 14, 29, 39) and VIP/Private (pgs. 13, 17, 34, 38, 41–42)

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Thanks to Mona Vangsnes Lien and the first working group for a great starting point. Thanks to Rosa Kompetanse, SANKS, Spillhuset, Mental helse ungdom, Ung Arena and other external collaborators for their input on previous editions. We would also like to thank Lena Skotland (Vestre Viken Hospital Trust) for reviewing the text and students from Båtsfjord VGS, Mandal VGS and Sandvika VGS as well as the School Student Union of Norway for their input on the 2022 edition. We also extend special thanks to students and staff at Jessheim VGS (2022) as well as Rud and Rosenvilde VGS (2015) for posing for the pictures.

First published 2015, 3rd edition, Drammen 2022.





"Our relationships and the things that happen in our lives all affect our mental health."

# For You

**In school, we learn a lot about different subjects. But it's also important to learn something about what it means to be human – our thoughts and feelings and our relationships with others.**

This booklet has been produced in conjunction with VIP Talk About It – a mental health programme for upper secondary school. This booklet may also be useful for the topics of public health and life skills in various classes.

It's normal to have more intense feelings after talking about mental health in class or reading a booklet like this one. We hope this booklet will encourage you to talk more about these topics with those around you.

If you're going through a tough time, we recommend that you talk to a professional. See the back of this booklet for information about who you can contact.

We hope you and your class will have many good conversations and discussions about mental health!

Kind regards from all of us at  
VIP Mental Health in Schools



**Relevant to the following topics of public health and life skills:** physical and mental health, managing thoughts, feelings and relationships as well as value-based choices and the importance of meaning of life.

# We All Have Mental Health

**Mental health is about how we feel within ourselves and how we handle the ups and downs we experience in life. We all have mental health and there are a lot of things that can affect it for better or worse.**

We might say that mental health is the part of our health that relates to our thoughts and feelings. Mental health is how we relate to and handle our thoughts and feelings, both on our own and in our relationships with others. In other words, mental health is not just how we feel, but also how we cope with life – especially when we're faced with challenges.

## **Mental and physical health**

Mental and physical health are related. It's often difficult to separate one from the other. When our bodies hurt, it might affect us mentally. And when we're not feeling

well mentally, it can affect us physically. We don't always know if pain and discomfort have a physical or psychological origin, or perhaps even both.

Our relationships and the things that happen in our lives all affect our mental health. External factors such as stress and pressure at school, our friendships, families and global events all lay the foundation for how we feel inside. We can't control these factors, but there are still things we can do to strengthen and look after our mental health. You can read more about this at the end of the chapter.



## Thoughts

Thousands of thoughts go through our heads over the course of a day. Put simply, we might say that some are negative, some are positive and some are neutral, although the majority of our thoughts are complex. Our thoughts can influence our feelings, and our feelings can influence our thought process.

It's easy to think that we're alone in having strange, exhausting or negative thoughts, but we aren't. It's quite common, for instance, to have sexual fantasies that we would never live out in real life, or to think a lot about what other people think of us. Sometimes we might feel like our thoughts are coming rushing at us, and we can't stop them. We call these racing thoughts.



### Worrying and overthinking

We may go through periods when we have a lot of painful thoughts about ourselves and find that we are spending a lot of time worrying or overthinking. Worrying refers to things that may happen in the future while overthinking refers to something that has happened in the past. Overthinking often happens when we have peace and quiet around us.

For instance, if we've had an argument with a friend, it's not uncommon to overthink what we could have done differently or why things turned out like they did. Often these kinds of thoughts go away on their own. Other times, we might feel like they take a lot of our energy and focus over time without doing any good.

### Thoughts are not dangerous

It's our actions that determine who we are. We all have "forbidden" thoughts once in a while. Accepting that a thought is just a thought and can't harm us or others is a good way to prevent thoughts from getting out of control.

If you have periods where you find it difficult to break negative thought patterns on your own, or your thoughts are getting in the way of your day-to-day life (e.g. disrupting your sleep or concentration at school), you might consider seeking help. The same goes if you ever have thoughts about taking your own life. You can read more about suicidal thoughts on page 18.

## Thinking Traps

Thinking traps are a kind of mental shortcut that we often use without realising it. It's especially common to fall into thinking traps while we're in an argument or experiencing strong emotions.

Such mental shortcuts are very common with for instance depression or anxiety (see p. 33). Below are some examples of common thinking traps<sup>1</sup>:

**Black and white thinking:** It's a failure unless it's perfect. "There's no point in starting to study now, I'm already doing so badly."

**Predicting the future:** Feeling certain about the future, often in a negative way. "I will never find a boyfriend/girlfriend" or "I will never finish school".

**Mind reading:** Thinking we know exactly what other people think about us. "She can tell I'm nervous" or "everyone here thinks I'm boring".

**Negative simplification:** Drawing a negative conclusion from a single incident. "I know that after this first day of school, I'm never going to make friends with anyone in my class."

**"Should" thinking:** Putting a lot of demands on ourselves about what we should be doing, the result often being that we fall short of our own high standards. "I should always be a good friend" or "I shouldn't feel that way".

## Thinking traps – what can help?

- Practise letting thoughts float on past – you don't need to go into each and every one of them.
- Set aside some time for overthinking, e.g. 15 minutes a day.
- Challenge your own thoughts: Did I just fall into a thinking trap? Is all this overthinking really of any help to me?
- Switch to a different activity. Do something totally different if you feel that you're not able to break out of difficult thoughts on your own.

You can read more about thinking traps and ways to handle them at [nbla.no](https://nbla.no):



<sup>1</sup>Taken from the Norwegian Association for Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, written by psychologist Torkil Berge. Read more about thoughts and thinking traps at [www.kognitiv.no](http://www.kognitiv.no).



## Feelings

Everybody has feelings, even though we express them in different ways. Sometimes our feelings are unpleasant or overly intense, but have you ever considered that feelings actually help us understand what is important to us?

Our feelings are linked to our thoughts. It's easy to think that there is something wrong if we don't feel happy, or that "no one else" have difficult feelings. The truth is that we actually have more negative feelings than positive ones, and we all experience vulnerable emotions such as loneliness and shame.

### What kinds of feelings are there?

Our fundamental human feelings are: joy, sadness, fear, anger and disgust. Many of our feelings are also a combination of other feelings. Jealousy, for instance, is a mix of fear, anger and sadness. Feelings help us make decisions and understand what is important to us, and we can feel them physically. Perhaps you've experienced a pain in your chest or a stomach ache caused by certain feelings?

### We react in different ways

We humans can differ widely when it comes to how **intensely** we feel an emotion, how we **express** our feelings and how we **handle** them. Here are some examples:

**Anna** generally feels content in her everyday life. Like everyone else, she too can get angry, afraid and sad – but usually, her feelings are not too intense, and they quickly pass.

**Ali** can feel both intensely happy and deeply sad on the very same day. His parents say he has been like this ever since he was very young, but they have noticed that his mood swings are even more pronounced since he became a teenager.

**Kim** is feeling a great deal of insecurity and worry, but they are uncomfortable showing how they feel or talking about it with anyone. Instead they put on their "fun and happy mask" every day at school, and their friends look at them as someone who is always in a good mood.

Sadly, some of us grew up learning that showing certain emotions is not "allowed", such as anger, sadness and fear – even though these are perfectly natural feelings in all of us. This can lead us to feeling more uncomfortable with certain feelings.

"We should take our feelings seriously, because they are there for a reason."





## Feelings are linked to our mental health

Learning how to be aware of what we are feeling is important for our mental health. If your parents are fighting or your boyfriend or girlfriend breaks up with you, it's perfectly natural to feel sad, angry and disappointed. We should take our feelings seriously, because they are there for a reason.

Hiding our feelings makes it more difficult for others to help and support us.

It's not good to be alone with our pain over time when what we really need is support and care. If we rarely or never have our emotional needs met, we might develop mental health problems.

## Managing Feelings

**When we talk about managing or dealing with our feelings, it doesn't mean that having feelings is wrong or that we need to get rid of them. Managing feelings is simply about finding ways to live with and understand them.**

Sometimes we manage our feelings automatically, like when we hide behind a cushion during a scary movie or pace around the room when we're unsettled. Other times, we actively choose how to handle our emotions. Like listening to an upbeat song when we're sad or counting to ten when we're angry.

### Be curious

We don't always know why we feel the way we do. Maybe you've come home from school and felt sad without knowing why? Try rewinding and going through the events of the day. Maybe it was a hurtful comment from a friend or something you didn't quite manage to do?

### Be kind to yourself

There are many factors that influence how we deal with and manage our feelings. These include everything from our personality to the maturation of our brains and our childhood experiences.

Sadly, many people blame themselves for hurting. Perhaps you've thought to yourself: "I need to just pull myself together" when you were sad or afraid? Showing self-compassion is about **allowing** a feeling to be there, trying to **understand** it and find out what you **need**. For example: *"Right now, I'm sad because I've argued with my friend. It makes sense that I'm sad now because she means a lot to me. Maybe I need to watch a funny show with another friend"*.

### Are there good and bad ways of managing our feelings?

Some of the ways we manage our feelings can work okay in the short term, but not so well if we do it too much. Eating sweets when we're sad or gaming when we're stressed is not bad in and of itself. But if it starts to affect our health and everyday life, it's time to find alternative ways to handle challenging feelings.

Some tactics for managing feelings may also be a warning sign that we have, or are developing, a mental health problem. These can include drugs or alcohol, self-harm, exercising excessively or starving oneself as a way of coping with difficult feelings. It might seem like the easiest option at the time, but in reality it just sustains the issue and can lead to more problems later on. You can read more about self-harm on the next page.



Learning healthy ways to deal with and manage our feelings can have a big impact on our well-being. Practise finding out what works for you. You can try focusing on your breathing when you're nervous, being in nature when you're stressed, going for a run when you're angry or talking to a good friend when you're sad. Remember that feelings fluctuate in

all of us. Nobody can control their feelings all the time.

You can read more about feelings and how to manage them at [ndla.no](http://ndla.no). There is also a film. This QR code is for a page called the Emotions Compass:



## Self-harm

**Self-harm is the collective term for harming oneself as an outlet for painful emotions, without intending suicide.**

Self-harm can be part of a mental health disorder, but it doesn't have to be. Many teenagers describe self-harm as a way to "be free of an unbearable feeling". We might also say that self-harm is a way of managing our feelings that is not good for us in the long term.

Initially, self-harm may feel like a solution and a way to gain control. However, for many, it's the beginning of a process of losing control. What we think of as a solution becomes the problem over time.

Self-harm can seem frightening for both the person doing the self-harm and for their friends and family.

People who harm themselves rarely do it as a way of getting attention. In most cases, the opposite is true: they feel ashamed and try to hide their injuries.

Visible wounds can nonetheless be a call for help and represent a hope that somebody will see and understand.

Many think self-harm is about wanting to take one's life, but it's rarely a suicide attempt. However, self-harm can become life-threatening if you hurt yourself without realising the level of danger.

It can be difficult to stop self-harming on your own, but there is a lot of good help available. Together with a professional, you can find new ways to cope with painful emotions.



## Self-esteem and self-confidence

**Self-esteem is the cornerstone of our mental health and is important for how we feel. It reflects how secure and valuable we consider ourselves to be. Self-confidence is the faith that we can do things. Few people go through life with very high self-esteem and self-confidence all the time.**

That is something we build through interactions with others from a young age. When we are seen and understood, and our feelings are taken seriously by those we love, our self-esteem grows stronger.

When people treat us badly – for instance by bullying or through abuse of power – our self-esteem takes a knock.

How we think about ourselves affects how we react to demands and expectations from our friends, school and society at large.

What we say to ourselves when we succeed or fail is an indication of our level of self-esteem.

Self-esteem and self-confidence can be linked but are not always. You might have high self-confidence on the football pitch but feel like a failure in life. Conversely, you might feel good as a person but have low self-confidence when it comes to schoolwork.

**Self-esteem is the fundamental perception we have of our own worth and how we feel when interacting with others. Self-confidence is about faith in our own abilities and what we think we can do. Self-esteem is related to being while self-confidence is related to doing.**

### High and low self-esteem

With high self-esteem, we accept ourselves as we are and often feel comfortable interacting with others. This allows us to say what we think, even if others have other opinions. We are willing to try new things and set boundaries for ourselves while also being aware of other people's needs.

With low self-esteem, we often have a negative view of ourselves. This makes us more vulnerable to mental health problems. Low self-esteem can, for instance,

lead to performance anxiety because we are afraid of failing. It can get in the way of forming good friendships because we feel uncomfortable and insecure about whether others like us. Expressing our own needs can be difficult because we are afraid of being rejected.

Low self-esteem often leads us to criticise ourselves and judge ourselves harshly. With low self-esteem, we can also become self-centered. Someone who boasts a lot does not necessarily have high self-esteem.

"When we are seen and understood, and our feelings are taken seriously by those we care about, our self-esteem grows stronger."



## Self-esteem is something we can build

Practising self-kindness can help strengthen your self-esteem. This involves recognising what you need and trying to accept who you are and the feelings you have.

How others treat us can have a huge effect on our self-esteem. Struggling with poor self-esteem doesn't mean you have done anything wrong. If your self-esteem has a negative effect on your everyday life, it might help to speak to somebody about it.

There's only one person you can be totally sure you'll be spending the rest of your life with, and that's you! So it's a good idea to have a good relationship with yourself. Forgive yourself for the things you've done that you're not proud of. Good relationships strengthen our self-esteem. So try to spend time with people who want the best for you.

## Loneliness and more about self-esteem

Poor self-esteem can lead to loneliness because it makes us insecure about our relationships. In turn, loneliness can lead to even worse self-esteem. Many adolescents experience loneliness, but we don't talk about this very much. At [ndla.no](http://ndla.no) you can read more about loneliness, self-esteem and self-confidence.

## The body and the mind

**The body and the mind are closely related. In our culture, body focus is often about appearance. But our bodies are much more than just that!**

For most of us, our bodies allow us to do things like walk, run, dance and exercise. Through our bodies we can sense our surroundings, and we can enjoy intimacy and touch. We can provide comfort and warmth to those we love. Simply judging our bodies by how they look is unfair.

In the past, clothes were tailored to fit the body. Today, it almost seems as if we are trying to tailor our bodies to fit the clothes. What effect does this have on us?

The beauty industry, which wants to make money, benefits when we are unhappy with ourselves. Because then we spend money on products that are supposed to help us look more like society's ideal. This is often so difficult to achieve that we never feel satisfied.

### Practise accepting your body

In a society that is so focused on appearance, it can be difficult not to be affected. Your body will be with you for the rest of your life, so try and focus more on what it does than how it looks.

We need to work to create a defense within ourselves against all the photoshopped images we see all the time. The beauty ideal changes across the decades and is different from culture to culture. Is it right that the beauty industry gets to decide what is considered beautiful?





### Omar (teacher)

*As a teacher, I talk to my students about how they are doing and what I can do to make school easier for them. I raise mental health as a topic both in connection with our schoolwork but also when the class needs to talk about something. The fact that my students tell me what they're struggling with is something I consider a vote of confidence, and it requires me to talk to them without judgement and with full confidentiality.*

## TIP: How you can take care of your mental health

There are a lot of things that affect how we feel. Many of these are things we can't change on our own. Nevertheless, we can do things to improve our mental health just like we can for our physical health. Below are some tips that might work well for you.

- Allow space for your feelings. They help you understand what you need.
- Don't keep painful thoughts and feelings to yourself. Talk about things that are difficult.
- Question negative thoughts. See if you can find alternative thoughts instead.
- Try to get enough sleep, eat a balanced diet and exercise.
- Set limits. It's perfectly fine to say yes, but you're allowed to say no, too.
- Listen to your body's signals and take them seriously.
- Be kind to yourself and try to accept yourself for who you are, all the good and the bad included. Practise this.
- You need others, and others need you. Make new connections, and maintain friends and family who want the best for you.
- Ask for forgiveness. It feels good to apologise, and it feels good to be forgiven.
- Go offline every once in a while. Be present in the moment and notice the world around you. This also makes it easier for others to reach you.
- Do things for others. Humans have a need to share what they've got and to be of help.
- Let someone know when something isn't right. School, society and parents/guardians should bear the greatest responsibility.

Read more  
in our article  
*What Can  
I Do to Look After  
My Mental  
Health?* at  
ndla.no:



## Pause for thought:

- How does the beauty industry affect our mental health?
- What can the class do to create an environment where it's easier to show feelings and talk about them?
- What do you think society, school and the adults at home can do to help you and your fellow students take care of your mental health?
- Think of three things you're grateful for at the moment. Try making this a nightly habit before you go to bed.





Relevant to the following topics in public health and life skills: physical and mental health, managing thoughts, feelings and relationships, setting boundaries and respecting others' boundaries, lifestyle habits, alcohol/drugs and media use.

# Life goes up and down





## Ups and downs in life are completely normal. Sometimes we feel happy. Sometimes we hurt. Having bad days means that we can also experience the opposite: feeling good.

One way to look at it is to think of the line on a heart monitor. It goes up and down as our heart beats. A flat line means the heart has stopped – that you aren't actually alive anymore. The fact that life goes up and down is quite simply part of what it is to be human. Some people experience ups and downs several times in a single day while others stay more even.

Our surroundings have a huge influence on our everyday lives and moods. Basic needs such as food and sleep are important. We also tend to feel good when we are safe and included in our community.

## Stress and pressure

Many adolescents feel pressure to perform well from their school, parents, coaches, friends and from themselves. This can lead to stress and the feeling that you are never quite good enough. Living under pressure and stress over long periods of time is not good for us.

Stress can affect us both positively and negatively. The right amount of stress can make you more focused on what you have to do, so you work more efficiently and perform better.

### Negative stress

Negative stress is when the demands of a situation are too high compared to the resources we feel we have. Many students feel that school places high demands on us and that we have no way to influence or change these demands. These kinds of situations can be extra stressful.

Experiencing prolonged stress can be negative both for our physical and our mental health. Typical symptoms of prolonged stress are problems sleeping, physical complaints, bad moods and trouble with concentration and memory.



### That feeling?

*It's like I just have no way of winding down. When I try to rest, my thoughts race and my heart starts pounding really hard. I feel nauseous, and I have to try to do something else. I struggle to fall asleep at night and wake up early in the morning even though I'm tired. My mum says I have to stop getting so stressed about school, but school is stressful! Our teachers don't communicate with each other and next week we have three tests one after the other. I don't know how I'm going to manage three years of this.*

Ingrid

## Pressure on social media

For most of us, life without social media would be unimaginable. It's a way to connect and communicate with each other. At the same time, the way we present ourselves is also a big part of using social media. The better we want to appear, the more pressure there is to seem perfect, both to ourselves and others.

Social media don't sleep and this can make us fearful of missing out. But it's also quite tiring to keep up all the time. It's a smart idea to log off every now and again, especially if you feel social media are affecting you negatively. Reflect on what you see. Is this really the truth? Also think about everything you don't see pictures of. Maybe you and your friends could agree to take breaks from social media over the course of a day?

## How to deal with stress and pressure?

It's rarely your own fault that you feel considerable stress or pressure. The school needs to take its share of the responsibility. You might want to talk to your parents, guardians or teacher about how it makes you feel when their expectations are too high.

There are a number of things you can do yourself to reduce stress in your everyday life. Be aware of your own expectations, set limits and keep a schedule of what you need to do and when. It can also be helpful to exercise, unwind, practise relaxing and resting or being social. Getting enough sleep is also important.

Visit [ndla.no](http://ndla.no) for a range of good resources on stress, pressure and coping with stress, including scientific articles, films, learning pathways and exercises.



## Going through a tough time

**We can't escape life's difficulties, even if we really want to. When accidents, grief or other stressful life events hit us, they often come as a shock.**

We use the term life crisis to describe these kinds of events. Perhaps we feel that nothing will ever be okay again, but usually it does get better.

### The school can help

If you are having a difficult time or struggling mentally, it is a good idea to tell somebody at your school. Speak to your contact teacher, the school nurse or another adult you trust. This can make it easier for you to be at school and to get through the difficulties.

The school can offer support to help you cope better in your day-to-day life. For example, you might be able to get an extension on a big project or some leeway concerning breaks and attendance. Of course, you don't have to tell the school everything if you don't want to. Just some straight-forward information might be enough for your school and teachers to be extra considerate.

Remember that the adults in your life also have had their difficult periods. It's part of their job to make your life at school easier when you're sick or going through a tough time. An email or a text message can be a good way to start a conversation.



## Stressful life events

Everyone goes through difficult moments over the course of their lives and this affects us all differently. Many of us experience our first life crises in adolescence.

Stressful life events can include bullying, moving, illness, a death in the family or fleeing from war. Grief and difficult emotions after a life crisis are not a mental illness, but stressful life events can nonetheless make it hard to function day to day.

### Grief

Grief is a natural response when we lose somebody or something that meant a lot to us. We might feel grief because somebody has passed away, a relationship or friendship has ended, our parents have divorced or because we or somebody else has become very ill.

Feeling strong emotions is perfectly normal and these often take time to pass. Talking with others, crying, writing, thinking and seeking comfort from other people or animals can all help. You might find solace in things like music, films, literature, religion, exercise or nature.

Sometimes we need help to get through our grief after a crisis. Crises that are not processed can develop into mental health problems if we carry our burden for a long time without getting better. You can read more about grief at [ung.no](http://ung.no) under “sorg og kriser”.



### Marthe (school nurse)

*As a school nurse, I talk with lots of great kids and teens each week. Often our conversations revolve around what the students themselves can do to improve their mental health. This also tends to be the focus when I visit classrooms as part of VIP Talk About It. Sometimes it doesn't take much at all to start a change, while other times it can take time. Getting in touch with me should be easy – knock on my door or send me a text message. No issue is too big or too small to contact me about. I'm rooting for all you guys!*

## Relationship breakups

Most of us will experience heartbreak over a breakup at some point in our lives. Just like other types of grief, heartbreak can feel powerful and overwhelming. It can feel like we'll never be happy again.

We might struggle to think about other things and we might end up doing things we wouldn't have done otherwise, out of desperation or as a way of making contact. We may also feel shame or lower self-esteem if we've been rejected or someone else has taken our place.

In the NRK series Rådebank, the main character, GT, experiences heartbreak over a breakup for the first time in his life when his girlfriend dumps him. He doesn't tell anybody how he struggles to get on with his everyday life. GT finally begins to feel better when he opens up to his friends and his boss at work about how he's really doing.

Heartbreak doesn't just affect us when we're dumped by a boyfriend or girlfriend; we can also experience it when we end a relationship ourselves or if we're rejected by someone we have a crush on.

We grieve for what we haven't got and what never was, and this longing or absence can be felt throughout the body. Sometimes it can lead to problems with eating and sleeping.

*Continues on the next page.*



Although heartbreak hurts, it's important to understand that it will pass, but that it might take some time. Talking to family and friends, being comforted and doing enjoyable things that normally make you happy are all things that can help.

Like GT, many boys hold back and don't tell others when they are struggling with heartbreak. Precisely because these feelings are so intense, some people feel like they will never go away and start thinking that they can't deal with them anymore. At this stage, it's important to seek help.



## Suicidal thoughts

**We all have moments when we want to go away. When life is heavy, we may feel like we want to escape or just disappear. We may even have thoughts about dying.**

Many of us experience these thoughts at some point in life. It can feel frightening, and it's important to speak with others about it. Feeling like you want to die for an extended period of time, and even planning how, is a warning sign. These thoughts say a lot about how much you are hurting.

When we're young, we haven't yet experienced that bad things can get better, the way adults have. Maybe you're feeling useless or ashamed, are in debt or heartbroken, have dark thoughts or secrets that are too heavy to carry? At times like this, it may feel impossible to go on.

Sometimes we need time to see that it's not as hopeless as it feels, even if you're hurting so much that it feels like nothing will ever get better. You need to give

yourself time and seek help to see that there are other options. Be careful around drugs and alcohol if you have suicidal thoughts.

We can't emphasise enough how important it is that you seek help if you feel like you want to die. Many people love you, even if it doesn't feel that way. Perhaps you think it would be a relief for everyone else if you weren't around. But that's not the case. You are worth so much more than you know, and we need you.

**Nobody ought to struggle alone with suicidal thoughts. Talk to someone you trust or ring Kors på Halsen on tel. 800 333 21. In an emergency situation, call 116 117 for out-of-hours medical care, or dial the emergency number 113.**

"Always seek help if you have suicidal thoughts."



## Alcohol, drugs and mental health

**Drugs and alcohol are a part of our culture, and they affect us in many different ways. Even so, we often don't talk about it in relation to mental health until someone develops a serious substance abuse problem. But what effect do alcohol and drugs have on our everyday psyche?**

Many people use drugs and alcohol as a way of managing their emotions. You can read more about this on page 9. Often we use drugs or alcohol to have fun, to relax, to improve our confidence, connect with people or to get a break from everyday life.

In some social environments, intoxication is important for bonding, for example when a group of friends meets up primarily to drink or take drugs together. It's not uncommon to feel peer pressure to drink or take drugs to fit in. This leads many young people to end up drinking more

than they had intended or trying drugs they didn't want to try. Others make a conscious choice not to drink or take any kinds of drugs and may feel like they have to explain why they don't drink alcohol, for example.

Lots of people have different opinions about drugs and alcohol, and there is a lot of different information out there. Perhaps the adults around you are mostly focused on all the dangers of drugs and alcohol, while your friends care more about what's fun and exciting? It can be difficult to know what to trust and what is right for you.



### Drugs and alcohol change our boundaries

Even if it might feel good to take drugs or drink, these substances affect our brain in one way or another. Drugs and alcohol increase our chances of being in an accident or having sex we later regret. They also increase the risk of being subjected to violence or becoming violent ourselves.

It's not uncommon to wake up the next day and regret something you have done or said. This could be something completely innocent, like being embarrassed that you danced in front of a lot of people or were more honest than usual. Other times, it might be something more serious that makes you feel anguished afterwards. Have you ever been subjected to violence, abuse or

anything else uncomfortable when you were drunk or high? Remember that it's never your fault – no matter what. You can read more about violence and abuse on page 30 and find out more about seeking help on page 43.

*Continues on the next page.*

<sup>2</sup>When we write about drugs in this text, we also include alcohol.



## Drugs/alcohol and vulnerability

Regardless of what choices you make around drugs and alcohol, it's important to remember that we all have different limits and tolerances. For example, even if you can handle a lot of alcohol, your friend might end up in a bad state from drinking the exact same amount. Or perhaps a friend might feel little effect from smoking weed, while in the same situation, you might be at risk of developing a psychosis (see page 38).

If you are having a tough time mentally, it's never a good idea to use alcohol or drugs as a way of feeling better.

## Where can I seek information and get help?

Both your school nurse and your GP can help you with any questions or issues you have about drugs or alcohol. You can also find a lot of information on [rusinfo.no](http://rusinfo.no). Here, there is also a chat service where you can get your questions answered by professionals, 100% anonymously:



"If you are having a tough time mentally, it's never a good idea to use alcohol or drugs as a way of feeling better."

### Pause for thought:

- Young people today say they feel more stress and pressure than adolescents in previous generations did. Why do you think that's the case?
- Why do some people find it difficult to ask for help when they are in pain?
- What can the adults around you do to take young heartbreak more seriously?
- There is an expectation in society that everyone drinks. Many people give wine as a present and we're usually offered beer at parties, even though we know that not everyone drinks. What do you think about that?





# Me and the others



**Relevant to the following topics in public health and life skills:** physical and mental health, managing thoughts, feelings and relationships, sexuality and gender, interpersonal relationships, setting boundaries and respecting others' boundaries, media use and, finally, value choices and the importance of meaning in life.

## At our core, we humans are social beings. That means we depend on one another to survive. Relationships with others affect our mental health, both for the better and the worse.

What characterises a good relationship is that we feel safe. Our boundaries and who we are as people are respected. We find that our thoughts and feelings are taken seriously. The relationships we have with others play a role in shaping who we are and how we think about ourselves.

It's natural to be aware of how others see us. We might wonder what other people think about our opinions, our clothes and what we do. If you become overly preoccupied with how others think of you, remember that most people are preoccupied with what's happening in their own lives.

### Interpreting others

We usually believe that our interpretation of what others say and do is correct, but it isn't always. A negative interpretation can lead you to think that others don't like you or to judge others without understanding what they really meant. Practising interpreting people in a positive way can do a lot for our self-esteem and mental health, and not least for our relationships with other people.







## Friendships

### What is a friend? Perhaps that depends on who you ask.

The word “friend” is used in many different ways. We use it for people we know very well or just a little, or who we spend time with all day at school or just online. Many young people feel it is easier to talk to a friend than an adult when going through a tough spot.

#### Not all friendships last forever

Many people don’t have a good friend they can truly be themselves around. Some of us don’t make close friends until we’re older and start studying at university or working. Some friendships last a lifetime, but most come to an end after a while because we change schools or develop different interests.

Friendships can bring a lot of joy but can also be demanding because they mean so much to us. If a friend often makes you feel stupid or wrong and make your life difficult, you might want to consider whether their friendship is good for you.

Losing a friend can be as painful as losing a romantic partner, but even so, we don’t talk about it as much. Why is that?

#### Being a good friend when somebody’s struggling

It’s not always easy to know what to say or do when a friend is hurting. More important than anything else is to show compassion, understanding and respect. Often we

feel like we want to fix things for them or give advice, but the best thing we can do is simply be there for them. Listen if your friend wants to talk, though maybe they might just want to hang out, have a hug or even just be in the same room together.

When we’re struggling, we often become less social. Keep inviting your friend to things even if they turn you down. It helps that you are there, holding the door open to ordinary teenage life.

Don’t take it personally if your friend needs to set boundaries and pull back every once in a while. Don’t be afraid to ask what they want or need from you. Your friend might not necessarily know the answer, but it feels nice to be asked.

“You don’t have to carry around big or dangerous secrets for other people.”



#### Friends don’t have a duty of confidentiality

If your friend is struggling and you think they might have a mental health problem or disorder, it’s important to make sure they get help.

You don’t have to carry around big or dangerous secrets for other people. For example, if you find out someone is experiencing suicidal thoughts, violence or abuse, you must tell an adult.

Go with your friend and seek help together. Or if you go alone, inform your friend that you are seeking help. You can speak to the school nurse anonymously on behalf of others.

At **ndla.no** there is a film about what it means to be a good friend to somebody who is struggling.



## Nobody is like everybody else

For various reasons, we may feel that we are different because we go against the grain or because we belong to a minority in our class and at school.

Perhaps you're the quietest guy in the class or one of only a few Muslim or Sami kids in your form? Or maybe you don't know of anyone else at school with a disability? You might think you're the only person who crushes on people of the same sex or perhaps you feel uncertain about your gender identity?

The very fact that there are so many examples goes to show just how many people feel they are different. The truth is, nobody is like everybody else. Human rights activist Kim Friele once said that "to be human is to be different".

"To be human is to be different"

Kim Friele



Going against a norm – i.e. whatever is most common – can feel good and make us feel proud if we are comfortable in who we are and supported by others. It can also be uncomfortable and you might feel alone. Try and remember that there is actually a lot of diversity in your classroom. There are so many different feelings, languages, cultures and dreams all mixed in together. A good classroom environment is accepting of people who are different. It's a place where you can be yourself, no matter who you are.

### You are not alone

Unfortunately, not all school environments are equally inclusive. Feeling different and alone is often painful. Try talking to someone you trust about how you're feeling. It could be a good idea to seek out environments where you know there are others more like you.

If you think it would be too difficult to speak to somebody at school or in your family, try contacting somebody by phone or using a chat service (see the back of this booklet). Perhaps this might be a first step towards becoming more familiar with yourself. Remember: the world needs you just the way you are.

## 100 percent human

When we are born, we are put into one of two categories: boy or girl. This then triggers a whole bunch of expectations about what we should like or how we should act. But it's not our gender that determines whether we like football, dancing or something else altogether. Try not to limit yourself or others based on gender.

Some of us feel that we are not the gender we were assigned at birth, for instance those of us who are transgender. It's important for our mental health that both you and the people you care about see you as one hundred percent human regardless of your gender.



## Minority stress

Being a minority means you belong to one or several groups of which there are smaller numbers or that are seen as less important or inferior to others. Most of us agree that diversity is good. Unfortunately, many minority groups still experience discrimination.

As minorities, we often become "invisible". We are missing from popular representations and stories about our society. For example, how many shows have you seen with a Sami person in the lead role? As minorities, we may also feel like we attract attention. A girl wearing a hijab or a boy wearing make-up might get a lot of looks and comments, for example.

Minority stress is the additional burden or strain that people in minorities often have to carry. This includes both the actual experience of negative reactions and also the fear of getting a negative reaction. It also includes feelings of shame and difficult emotions around how we see ourselves.

We all have a responsibility to create a society where everyone can feel comfortable being themselves. You can read more about this and watch a video about minority stress at [ndla.no](http://ndla.no).

"Remember: the world needs you just the way you are."





## Bullying and insults

**Bullying and insults are unfortunately a part of everyday life for many students. You have a right to feel at ease in school and you shouldn't have to put up with behaviour that makes your daily life miserable.**

The school has a responsibility to make sure the school environment is safe and positive. Most schools do a lot of good work to make sure their students feel content. Even so, they don't always manage to create a safe environment for all.

We are not always aware ourselves as to how we affect others. What do you say with your words, your body language, likes and comments on social media? Ignoring or excluding is also hurtful.

Bullying and insults can take many different forms, and both adults and young people can be bullies. Sometimes bullying can be difficult to recognise.

Bullying makes people feel like they aren't a valuable part of the community. This is serious because we all have a need to belong. You can help create a better environment by including everyone, both at school and online.

### Why does bullying happen?

When bullying happens, it is the result of negative social relationships and environments. It often stems from the broader frameworks that adults create for how you all interact and get along together. If there is little room for diversity, then students who differ from the majority in some way – e.g. because of their skin colour, religion, gender, sexuality or disability – may become victims of **identity-based** bullying. This can be particularly harmful because it targets who you are.

"If you're being bullied, it doesn't mean that there is anything wrong with you." It's the social environment around you that needs to change."



If you're being bullied, it doesn't mean that there is anything wrong with you. It's the social environment around you that needs to change. Responsibility for this lies with the adults at school. In addition, we all have a responsibility to behave properly and include others.

Speak up if you see somebody being bullied or insulted. This applies not just at school, but all places where you are together – including on the internet.

### Are you someone who bullies others?

It can be painful to recognise and accept that we are guilty of bullying another person. Few of us ever want to hurt other people on purpose. Even so, we sometimes do and say things we know are wrong. Sometimes we do it for fear of being bullied ourselves.

Most of us have said and done things for the approval of others. It makes us feel good at the time, but in the long run, it isn't good for anyone. You have the opportunity to make different decisions. This is important for both you and the person who is bullied.

### Bullying can lead to mental health problems and disorders

If your school fails to do anything about situations within the school environment, then you or somebody you trust can contact the student or anti-bullying ombudsman in your local county. You can also contact your county governor.

Read more about bullying at:

[Nullmobbing.no](http://Nullmobbing.no)

[Elevombudene.no](http://Elevombudene.no)

[Snakkommobbing.no](http://Snakkommobbing.no)

## Spreading of sexual rumours and illegal sharing of images

Unfortunately, many adolescents are subjected to spreading of sexual rumours or illegal sharing of images of them. This can affect our mental health and can feel like a kind of bullying. We all have a responsibility for what we share of and about others, knowingly or unknowingly.

To avoid being party to rumour spreading, avoid discussing others behind their backs and commenting too much about how others live or what they do. Speak up if you hear people spreading rumours about other people and say you don't think this is okay. Even something that seems funny or unimportant to you may affect others more than you realise.

Many people also discover that their personal videos or photos are being spread against their will. It can feel horrible to know that a private or vulnerable image of you – perhaps naked or partially clothed – is suddenly available for all to see. It's easy to feel ashamed in this situation, but you have not done anything wrong. No one has the right to spread pictures of you against your will. This is illegal and punishable by law.

An adult you trust can help you deal with the experience and to have the picture taken down. Visit [Ung.no](http://Ung.no) to find several articles about image sharing. You can also read more at [dubestemmer.no](http://dubestemmer.no) or [politet.no/delbart](http://politet.no/delbart).





## Sex and our psyche

**Sexuality is a part of our lives and health. Sex can give us happiness, intimacy, self-esteem and pleasure. Even so, many people have worries related to sex.**

Many people are afraid they won't meet somebody that they connect with or that they won't be "good enough". So much focus on sex in the media can make people believe that the rest of the world has better sex than they do.

It can take time to get to know another person sexually, and good sex often requires communication around what we like and dislike. Masturbating is a good way to get to know yourself better and to discover what you like.

We humans are all different when it comes to what and who turn us on. Some people are easily turned on, others not as much.

Some people are attracted to different genders, others just to one. Some people lose their virginity early while others wait. Some people have a lot of sex, some have a little and some people don't have sex at all because they don't want to or because they haven't got anyone to have sex with.

"You are the only one who knows what is right for you when it comes to if, when, how and with whom you want to have sex."

Remember that sex is much more than just intercourse. For example, it's more common to experience an orgasm through stimulation of the clitoris than through intercourse. Visit the website [Sex & samfunn \(Norwegian\)](#) to read more about different types of sex.

### Sex must be consensual

Being rejected by somebody you want to have sex with can feel painful, and it can be difficult to reject someone else, too. But sex should be pleasurable. Before you have sex with somebody, it's important to be completely sure that the person or people you want to have sex with also want to have sex with you. It's not enough to just assume!

Everyone has the right to say yes or no to what they want. It doesn't mean yes even if someone hasn't said no. Moreover, just because somebody has said yes to one thing, it doesn't mean that they have said yes to anything else. It's never your fault if you are pressured into something you haven't said yes to. Nobody has any right to you or your body. It belongs to you and you alone.



You are the only one who knows what is right for you when it comes to if, when, how and with whom you want to have sex.

### Porn

Porn is more available than it was in the past, and often more violent. Many adolescents watch porn long before they have sex themselves. Porn activates the reward system in our brains, which means that many people want to watch porn often. If you get used to watching porn every time you masturbate, for example, you might end up having trouble getting turned on or masturbating without it.

It's important to understand that most porn doesn't show bodies or sex realistically – most of it is acting. In real life, sex is often clumsy and exploratory, and there is no guarantee anyone will have an orgasm.

***How does porn affect how we feel and think about sex and our bodies?***

***How can porn be positive?***



## Violence and sexual abuse

Unfortunately, many people experience violence and sexual abuse. This is more common than we might think and can happen to anyone regardless of gender, age or background. The abuser is often somebody we know.

There are many different types of violence. Put simply, violence is an act directed at another person which harms, frightens, violates, or gets them to do or to stop doing something against their will.<sup>3</sup> Violence can be *physical*, e.g. punching, kicking, strangleholds, pinching and pushing.

Violence can also be *psychological*, e.g. threats, ridicule, excessive jealousy or controlling what another person is allowed to do. Being subjected to psychological violence can harm our self-esteem. If somebody is told day in, day out, that they are worthless and stupid, it's not surprising

if they start having negative thoughts about themselves or get nervous in the company of others.

It can also be very frightening to witness somebody smashing walls, furniture or objects. This is called *material* violence.

Being subjected to violence can lead us to fear violence happening again and this fear can begin to take over our lives. This is something known as *latent* violence. Witnessing violence against or between parents is often considered violence against children.



### Elin (child welfare officer)

*As a child welfare officer, I talk with many young people and their families and offer support and help in difficult situations. My goal is to be an adult that young people can trust, and to help make their lives better and easier through dialogue, guidance and by being there for them. Family guidance can look at how families are doing in their home life as well as other practical things. Everyday life can often be made better with a little help and support at home. In some cases, young people might need to live elsewhere for a shorter or longer period of time.*

### Sexual assault

Violence can also be sexualized. Sexual assault is when you are forced, threatened or tricked into watching or taking part in sexual acts against your will. It's also considered assault if a person is unable to consent, for example because they're sleeping or too drunk or high to express that they don't want to. About half of all sexual assaults on young people are committed by other young people, and many sexual assaults happen online.

Violence and sexual assault are punishable by law in Norway. It is also against the law to have sex with children and young people under the age of 16.

Being the victim of violence and assault can be devastating to our self-esteem and health, and it can harm our trust in other people. It can also leave us with trauma that we need help to process (read more about PTSD on page 36).

Try and share what you've gone through with someone you trust.

"If you don't get the help and support you need, go to somebody else until you are taken seriously."

<sup>3</sup>Our definition is based on the definition of Per Isdal from *The Meaning of Violence (Meningen med Volden)*, 2000.





## It is not your fault

Sometimes we do not always realise that we are the victims of violence or abuse. It can be tough to speak up and tell someone. We might be afraid that nobody will believe us or that others will find out.

Sometimes the abuser might threaten us into silence, for example by saying they will hurt a person or animal we care about if we speak out. Many people feel shame or guilt over what they have experienced. Remember that

it's always the person who commits violence or abuse who is responsible. It's never your fault!

Try and share what you have experienced with somebody you trust. If you don't get the help and support you need, go to somebody else until you are taken seriously. Read more about violence and sexual abuse at **atv-stiftelsen.no** and **dinutvei.no**. These websites also offer help to people who have been the perpetrators of violence and abuse.

## When someone in your family is ill

**When somebody gets sick, their whole family is affected. Having an ill parent or guardian can be difficult. Many become insecure, afraid or feel alone. This affects many kids and adolescents, and there is help available.**

Worrying about a parent or guardian can be exhausting. Many experience trouble with sleep, concentration and feelings of guilt. This leaves little energy for friends and hobbies. These are very common responses.

If you feel this way, it's important that you don't suffer in silence with your thoughts and worries. Talk to your parents, your GP or your school nurse. They can tell you more about the illness, but above all they can talk to you and listen to your experience of the situation.

### You have a right to information

If one of your parents/guardians is ill and undergoing treatment, you have a right to information and a right to contact the health service.

Some parents don't like talking about their illness. But a lack of information can lead to misunderstandings and cause more worry, perhaps without reason. Most parents/guardians will eventually understand how this also affects you.

Friends are also important, so speak with someone you trust. Bringing secrets out into the open is often something that comes as a relief. It's exhausting to pretend everything is fine when it isn't.

The organisation Voksne for Barn (Adults for Children, **vfb.no**) runs Ungt Nettverk, which is a network for young people with a difficult home life or struggles of their own. At **ung.no/psykisk** you can find an article entitled: *Har du foreldre som sliter psykisk?* Also check out **ungeparorende.no**.

## Pause for thought:

- What is consent?
- How do you help create a good environment in your class and at school? Do you contribute just for some people or for all?
- What can your school, contact teacher and the students do to create a good social environment in class?
- How do norms (like gender norms) affect our mental health? How can we create a class environment that allows everyone to be themselves?

# Mental health complaints and disorders

All of us can experience mental health complaints and disorders over the course of our lives. It's normal to feel that life is tough at times, or that negative thoughts and feelings take up a lot of space. But when does that become a psychological complaint or disorder?

We can talk about **mental health difficulties or complaints** when negative thoughts and feelings become so intense that they affect our lives over time. One example is being so sad that you struggle to sleep or concentrate. This can develop into a mental illness, but in most cases it doesn't. It's important to remember that having a tough time is not the same as being ill.

A **mental disorder or illness** is when a psychologist or a doctor gives you a diagnosis after a thorough assessment, and you will need treatment. Most of us will experience mental health complaints over the course of our lives, and some of us will even develop a mental disorder. Around eight percent of children and teens are diagnosed with a mental illness each year, but the real number is probably higher.

"For most mental disorders, we know that the earlier we get help, the better our chances of a full recovery."



## Why do we get mental health disorders?

We have already looked at some of the things that can cause mental health problems in this booklet. Many of us feel we are not good enough when we are constantly expected to do well in so many different areas of life. Experiencing stress and pressure over time can have a negative effect on our mental health. We have already taken a look at minority stress (page 25).

We don't always know why some people develop a mental illness and others don't. Some of us are more prone to developing a mental illness, just as some of us are more prone to developing certain physical illnesses. But that doesn't mean you will develop an illness just because a family member has one. When it comes to mental illnesses, what we do know is that the earlier we get help, the better our chances of a full recovery.

## Depression

**A lot of people say they're depressed when they're having a bad day. But being depressed is much more than just feeling sad. Depression is one of the most common mental disorders in Norway.**

Taking a gloomy view on life from time to time is normal. However, long periods of sadness and difficult thoughts that affect our sleep, concentration and quality of life could be a sign of depression. The reasons can be many. Something might have happened in your life that you haven't been able to process properly, or you might have been subject to pressure and stress over a long period.

Depression can also have biological causes, such as problems with your metabolism or a hormonal imbalance. It's also important to know that most adolescents with depression get too little sleep, and that sleep deficit causes many of the same symptoms as depression.

### That feeling?

*Everything feels so heavy. I'm tired all the time and I just want to sleep. I don't feel like doing anything. I don't care about anyone or anything, even if deep down I do. I just have no energy to be happy about things anymore. I can't get anything done at school and the teacher nags at me to pay attention. Nobody knows what's going on inside my head.*

*Mohammed*

If we experience a crisis or are subjected to various kinds of prolonged psychological strain (such as bullying, abuse or similar) without getting help, this can develop into a mental health disorder. The society we grow up in is also crucial. Expectations and pressure from society and our families can contribute to making us ill.

There are big differences between various disorders, and the same disorder can affect different people in different ways. If you think you might be in the process of developing a mental illness, talk to the school nurse or your regular GP. No matter what kind of mental health problem or disorder you are struggling with, there is help available. The school can also help you if you're having a tough time. Read more about this on page 16.

### The voice of depression

Most people with depression spend a lot of time brooding and being self-critical. This often involves dwelling on all the things you haven't achieved or how stupid, ugly or inadequate you feel. Many people also feel irritable and angry, while others feel completely flat emotionally. When you're depressed, you aren't always aware of your own state because you are so used to the depression tinting how you think and feel.





## It helps to share how you feel

Many people with depression withdraw from others, which makes them feel even more alone. With depression, it often helps to do the opposite of what you feel like doing. Being with people you care about or being

physically active are examples of things that can help. It's important to understand that the pain you carry around with you is part of a depression. You can't help that you are depressed, but you can do something about it. Don't suffer in silence – talk to somebody!

- Symptoms:** Feeling tired, fatigued and heavy. No energy or drive. Sad, irritated and “numb”. Poor appetite (or overeating), trouble sleeping and poor memory. Low self-esteem and a lot of guilt. Dark, negative thoughts and perhaps even suicidal thoughts.
- Prevalence:** Around ten percent of Norway's population is affected by depression in any given year.
- Treatment:** Counselling, alone or with your family. Enough sleep, physical activity, a healthy diet. Medication works for some people, in combination with counselling. Other measures should always be tried before a young person is prescribed antidepressants.

“It's important to understand that the heavy burden you carry is part of a depression, and that something can be done about it.”



### Camilla (psychologist)

*As a psychologist, I can help with the treatment of various mental health problems and disorders. We try together, through dialogue, to identify the underlying cause, and then we make a plan for how to feel better. Sorting through thoughts and feelings is often a good place to start. When a young person is struggling mentally, it's also important that people around them approach them in a positive way. I can help with this by providing guidance to the school and the adults at home if needed.*

## Anxiety

**Fear and apprehension are natural and necessary reactions in all people. They sharpen us and help us act under pressure. Anxiety becomes a mental disorder when the fear you feel is greater than it should be, when it's prolonged over time and when you start going out of your way to avoid the things you are scared of.**

There are many causes of anxiety. It might be related to your relationship with those who cared for you growing up, or your anxiety might be a reaction to negative thoughts and feelings carried over time. Anxiety can lead you to withdraw from your friends and family and perform worse than before.

### Anxiety is a bodily reaction

Fear is a strong bodily reaction which puts our nervous system into action. That's why many people worry there is

something physically wrong with their bodies when they experience an anxiety reaction. No wonder, since it can leave us with a pounding heart and feeling like we can hardly breathe.

When you know you have anxiety, you can start learning to handle these experiences because you understand that they are your body's reaction to anxiety, and they will pass. Anxiety isn't dangerous, but it can be very unpleasant.

### *That feeling?*

*Anxiety can come on suddenly. I might be sitting in the classroom and suddenly feel really nauseous. I just want to go home as quick as possible. But then I realize it's the anxiety, so the next step is to figure out what brought it on. There is usually an explanation. For instance, I'm dreading something or worried about seeing somebody I've had a fight with. It often helps if I'm able to talk to somebody about why I get anxious.*

Ánte

### Different types of anxiety

Anxiety disorders is a collective term for various forms of anxiety. Many people have **specific phobias** of insects, objects or situations. The most common anxiety disorder among young people is **social anxiety or social phobia**. This is characterised by a fear of situations with other people, where you have to perform or where there is a risk of making a fool of yourself. It might feel insurmountably difficult to speak up in class or go to a party.

**Panic disorder** is a type of anxiety that often feels like a bolt from the blue. You might find your heart starts racing, you begin to shake and you feel as if you can't breathe. The added fear of having the same experience again can reinforce your anxiety. This can lead to staying away from places or situations that you associate with anxiety. Many people with panic disorder develop anxiety about their anxiety.



**Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)** is a form of anxiety characterised by worry. People with this type of anxiety disorder often worry about their health, money or the people they love. Strong physical symptoms are also common such as headache and nausea. Many also feel edgy and restless.

*Continues on the next page.*

**An obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)** is when you suffer from obsessive thoughts and/or compulsive behaviour. Common examples are the fear of infection or forgetting something important that might cause an accident. Sometimes these thoughts lead to compulsive actions that we feel we need to repeat again and again, like excessive handwashing.

**Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** is a diagnosis we can get after a traumatic experience, such as your own or someone else's life being threatened, war, sexual assault,

torture, serious accidents, catastrophes or prolonged and serious bullying. One characteristic of PTSD is that the person affected has been unable to flee or to resolve the situation. People who suffer from PTSD often relive the event in their dreams and nightmares or as flashbacks while awake. It's common to feel skittish and on your guard, and to avoid situations that remind you of your experience. PTSD can begin shortly or long after the event itself. Not everyone who experiences trauma develops PTSD.

"Fear is a strong bodily reaction which puts our nervous system into action. That's why many people worry there is something physically wrong with their bodies when they have an anxiety reaction."



- Symptoms:** Nausea, rapid heartbeat, fear, agitation, feeling "scared stiff" for no particular reason or around certain people, animals, things or situations.
- Prevalence:** Around fifteen percent of Norway's population is affected by an anxiety disorder in any given year.
- Treatment:** Various forms of therapy, self-help and in some cases medication. In order to become free from anxiety, we have to practise facing our fears. In the case of severe anxiety, this is best done together with a professional, and it is important to proceed gradually.

More information: [ung.no/psykisk](http://ung.no/psykisk) and [angstringen.no](http://angstringen.no).



## Eating disorders

**We often think that eating disorders are about food, body image and weight. In reality, eating disorders are primarily about feelings.**

We live in a society that puts a lot of focus on body image, dieting and exercise. Unfortunately, the result is that many of us feel our bodies aren't good enough. As with other mental health disorders, there is no one single reason why somebody develops an eating disorder, but they often start with bullying or negative comments from others about the person's body.

**Tip!** It's a good idea not to comment on other people's bodies, even if what you want to say to them is a compliment. You never know what lies behind a change in another person's weight or body shape.

Dieting is sometimes – but not always – the beginning of an eating disorder. Some people find after a while that they can't stop their thoughts around food, body image

and weight, and that they control more and more areas of their life.

People with an eating disorder often have a distorted image of what their own bodies look like. Eating disorders can affect anyone, regardless of gender or age.

### Chaotic feelings

Eating disorders can be a way of dealing with emotional chaos. Many people who develop an eating disorder experience a strong sense of self-loathing. Focusing on food or body can give us a temporary feeling of control and help us manage our feelings of not being good enough.

Eating disorders often go hand in hand with a lot of shame. We try to keep our relationship with food secret and this often causes us to feel alone.

### That feeling?

*It's 3:45 a.m. and I can't sleep. No one else is awake and I'm lying alone on the sofa. I feel fat and disgusting. I've been eating all night and I feel full, bloated and sick. I'm stuffed, but I still want more. When I eat enough, I get so full that I almost feel numb. Like there's no room for anything else. Then I don't feel anything.*

Maria

### Different types of eating disorders

**Binge eating disorder** is characterised by episodes of overeating without trying to purge or bring up what you've eaten. You often eat even when you're not hungry. People with this disorder can be normal weight or overweight, or they might experience drastic weight changes.

**Bulimia** is characterised by periods of overeating followed by an attempt to purge to avoid gaining weight.

**Anorexia** is the most well-known but least common form of eating disorder. It's characterised by limiting what and how much you eat in a way that has a huge impact on your day-to-day life. Almost all thoughts and actions come

to revolve around food and body image in people with anorexia. Suffering from anorexia without seeking help can lead you to become severely underweight and this can be life threatening.

**Orthorexia** is a disorder that involves being obsessed with eating healthily. It demands so much time and energy that the focus on "health" begins to affect your everyday life and relationships. **Megarexia** is an extreme obsession with building muscles and bulking up. Despite weight and muscle gains, you never feel you are good enough or strong enough. Orthorexia and megarexia are not formal diagnoses but they are nonetheless designated as eating disorders.

*Continues on the next page.*

**A serious eating disorder can have major consequences. That's why it's important to get help early.**

- Symptoms:** Abnormal eating habits and feelings of guilt after eating. Obsession with weight, body image and food. Contempt for your own body, mood swings, trouble concentrating, depressive symptoms and behaviour changes. Shame and withdrawal. Weight loss, weight gain or large weight fluctuations.
- Prevalence:** Disordered eating is considerably more common than eating disorders. Of eating disorders, binge eating is the most common, affecting two to three percent of the population.
- Treatment:** Most people recover completely from their eating disorders through counselling and meal training. For young people, it's important that the entire family is involved in the treatment.
- More information:** At ROS (Counselling for Eating Disorders) is a service that allows you to both chat and have free sessions with counsellors, without a doctor's referral:



## **Psychosis and bipolar disorder**

**Psychosis can be described as having difficulties distinguishing between what is real and what isn't. Bipolar disorder is when you have periods of extreme mood swings.**

Normally, psychoses develop gradually over many years, but psychoses caused by drugs can come on suddenly. Psychoses often involve hallucinations which means that you see things that aren't there or hear things that others can't hear. Delusions are another common symptom. You might feel like you are being watched or persecuted.

Psychosis can occur as part of a psychotic disorder such as schizophrenia, but it can also be present in other disorders like bipolar and severe depression.

Bipolar disorder is the same as what we used to call manic depressive disorder. Bipolar means two poles (extremes). One of these poles represents manic or hypomanic periods characterised by high self-confidence, little need for sleep and racing thoughts. Hypomania is a milder form of mania. The other pole is

depressive periods characterised by the same symptoms as standard clinical depression (see page 33). Many people with bipolar disorder have no symptoms for large parts of their life.

It is important to get help quickly if you are in the process of developing a psychosis or bipolar disorder. At **psykose-bipolar.no** you can find useful information about both disorders:



## Addiction

**Addiction is a problematic, excessive and compulsive relationship with alcohol, intoxicating substances or a particular activity. You might feel like you can't get by without your addiction. Addiction can develop into various different mental disorders.**

Addictive substances include nicotine, alcohol, anabolic steroids and illegal drugs. Social media, gaming, mobile phone usage, porn and excessive exercising are all things that can also develop into an addiction.

There is no specific threshold between normal use and addiction, or when you truly become addicted to something. It's not uncommon for friends and family to believe a person is addicted to something, while the person themselves believe they just like alcohol a little extra or they love gaming.

As you have read elsewhere in this booklet, things become a problem or a disorder when they affect our lives and daily functioning. If taking drugs or gaming starts to affect your schoolwork, social life or finances, then it's problematic.

Problematic usage or addiction can lead to frequent arguments with people you love. You may have feelings of shame or guilt. Your addiction takes up a lot of time, and you often feel irritated or annoyed if you have to go without. Other symptoms can include restlessness, trouble sleeping and withdrawal symptoms.

### That feeling?

*I hate school. I feel like I have no business there. The others don't even notice when I'm not there anyway, and my friends are online. Me and dad fight all the time. He says he doesn't recognise me anymore. And what does it matter anyway if I game a lot? It's my life. If I want to spend all night playing video games then that's my right!*

Kim

### Gaming addiction

It's completely normal to think gaming is fun and to be excited about new games. But when the gaming starts having considerable negative consequences, we might be talking about an addiction. We can become addicted to gambling, video games, online games or games on our phones. Among other things, it's an escape from our troubles in life or from painful emotions.

The first step to changing problematic behaviour or breaking an addiction is to accept and admit that you have a problem. Ask yourself why and consider alternative choices and actions.

Many municipalities have initiatives and services that target problematic drug abuse. Examples include cannabis diversion programmes and substance abuse contracts through the health service or police prevention unit. More long-term treatment or admission to a rehab centre might be necessary in some cases. It's important to involve networks such as friends and family in order to make a successful change.

More information: [ung.no](http://ung.no)/[rusmidler.rustelefonen.no](http://rusmidler.rustelefonen.no) or [hjelpelinjen.no](http://hjelpelinjen.no).





## Neurodevelopmental disorders

**ADHD, ADD and Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are not mental health disorders, but they affect our psyches and our everyday lives.**

- **ADHD** stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. It's a condition with three core symptoms: difficulties *concentrating*, *hyperactivity* and *impulsivity*. There is also a variant called ADD, which is the same thing but without the hyperactivity component. To be diagnosed with ADHD or ADD, symptoms need to have begun before you were five years old and be present in several areas of your life. Many young people go through periods at school where they struggle with concentration and might think they have ADHD, even if they don't.
- **Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)** is a collective term for a number of different conditions which all concern difficulties communicating and social interaction with others. It can also go hand in hand with repetitive behaviours and strong interests in specific topics. Here, too, the symptoms need to have been present since early childhood to get this diagnosis. Some people with autism function very well in their everyday lives while others need a lot of help.

You can read more on the health pages at [ung.no](http://ung.no).

### Pause for thought:

- Many young people uses diagnoses to describe emotions. Why do you think that's the case? For example, do you think it's easier to say you are depressed than to say you're sad, or have anxiety when you're nervous?
- Why do you think some of us don't seek help when we have mental health problems?
- Depression is often considered a widespread disease. Many believe that the society we live in is much to blame for it. What do you think it is about our society that leads so many to become depressed?

# Three voices on psychological complaints

We have asked three young people to talk a little bit about their mental struggles and what helped them to feel better.

## Torgrim

**What did you get help with:** Difficult thoughts and feelings, panic attacks.

**Where:** Ung Arena (low threshold service for children and young people aged 12–25, no referral needed)

### **What did the treatment consist of?**

I spoke with a therapist each week for around six months. I'd known for a while that something was wrong, but I'd gotten used to this being normal. My partner suggested I talk to somebody and we found a free service offering help. During my sessions with the therapist, we talked about my problems, but we also talked about what I like and dislike, and we talked about music. I had it confirmed to me that a lot of what I was struggling with was normal. I also found out that some of my difficulties today are connected to things I experienced in the past. I learned to recognise different signals in myself and to become more aware of my role in social settings.

### **Where are you today?**

I have moved to another town. I have a job I love, and I live with my partner. The help I got allowed me to get to know myself better, and to better understand my own feelings and

reactions. I know where my problems stem from and understand why things have been tough. I found it was a great help to air my thoughts with a professional.

**Advice to others:** No matter what the problem is, it's important to know you're not alone in feeling that way. Even if you don't know what's wrong, if you feel like something is a problem for you, then that's reason enough to seek help. It's important to get help. If you find it too daunting to seek help alone, bring along somebody you trust. It can also help to think of your therapist or the professional as a kind friend who wants to help you.

**Read more about panic disorder on page 35.**



## Emilie

**Got help with:** depression and managing her emotions

**Where:** Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (BUP) and the District Psychiatric Centre (DPS). Both require a referral from a psychologist or a doctor.

### **What did the treatment consist of?**

I've been to various different therapists throughout my teenage years. I also did a course at the district psychiatric centre a few years ago which was really helpful. The course was for people aged 18 to 30 and ran for nine weeks. We learned how to gain more control over our feelings. We also practised approaching ourselves and others with a curious and non-judgmental attitude. This can help reduce misunderstandings in our relationships with others. What I learned in the course has helped me to feel more reflective and has allowed me to better relate to my own feelings today. When I was depressed, one of the most important things was that I was strongly encouraged to find a job and get out into the world of work. It's important not to become isolated when you're depressed.



### **Where are you today?**

These days I work at a nursery school, and I'm finishing upper secondary school at the same time. I still have difficult periods sometimes, but now I am very conscious of what I need. Now I know that things will get better again. For me, it's important to stick to my routines, spend time with friends and family and be physically active. I make plans with others to make sure I exercise.

### **Advice to others:**

Sometimes there's not much more you can do than to persevere and remember that things will get better in time.

**Read more about depression on page 33.**

## Erlend

**What did you get help with:** anxiety and psychotic symptoms.

**Where:** Psychiatrist who is a contract specialist (this costs the same as what you pay through the public sector when you are over 18) and the District Psychiatrist Centre. Both required a referral from a psychologist or a doctor.

### **What did the treatment consist of?**

For me, it was medication that helped me the most. I've had regular follow-ups with a psychiatrist for several years. Personally, I haven't had much need for counselling. Talking with my family has helped me a lot, but I've also had some sessions at the District Psychiatric Centre. I was very sick my last six months in upper secondary school, and we had a meeting with all my teachers, my mum and my psychiatrist. This meant I was able to get really excellent support at school, and I was able to graduate upper secondary with a complete diploma.



### **Where are you today?**

I've tried a few different jobs and studies, and now I'm working as a freelance photographer while studying art curation. I'm really enjoying both pursuits. I live a fairly normal life, but I try not to stress about things so much. I try to get enough sleep. I've focused on having people in my life who make me happy, and I've dropped friends who stressed me out. Nowadays I don't feel the same fear as I used to, if I experience a hallucination.

### **Advice to others:**

You've got nothing to lose by seeing the doctor, and it never hurts to ask for help. We are lucky in Norway that we have free health service.

**Read more about psychosis on page 38.**



# Where can I get help and information?

As part of the VIP Talk About It programme, the school will also provide students with a local help list. Ask for a copy if you don't have one.

**Remember that there is always help to be had when life gets tough. In the event of acute illness, whether mental or physical, call 113, or for out-of-hours medical care call 116 117. Below is a list of places where you can access help or more information.**

## More information:

**Ung.no** – Government information website for adolescents: [ung.no/psykisk](http://ung.no/psykisk)

**Helsenorge.no** – Directorate of Health information website: [helsenorge.no/psykisk-helse](http://helsenorge.no/psykisk-helse)

**Toolbox with a list of safe health apps** – [tjenster.helsenorge.no/verktøy](http://tjenster.helsenorge.no/verktøy)

## Help services:

**Emergency Helpline for Children and Young People** – Chat or phone 116 111 / text 417 16 111

**Ung.no** – Ask questions about youth issues or search questions asked by others: [ung.no/oss](http://ung.no/oss)

**Kors på Halsen (Red Cross)** – Talk about what's on your mind – chat or call +47 800 33 321

**Red Cross Hotline for Arranged Marriages and Genital Mutilation** – [rødekorstelefonen.no](http://rødekorstelefonen.no) – tel. 815 55 201

**Mental Health Helpline** – For anyone who needs someone to talk to – Tel: 116 123

**Norwegian National Guide to Help Services, Information & Expertise on Rape, Other Sexual Abuse and Violence in Close Relationships** – [dinutvei.no](http://dinutvei.no)

**Nok. Centres** – Low threshold service for victims of abuse – [noknorge.no](http://noknorge.no) – Tel: 948 14 385

**Unge Relasjoner** – Information and chat for anyone worried they might be in an unhealthy relationship – [ungerelasjoner.no](http://ungerelasjoner.no)

**RusInfo** – Information about alcohol, drugs and drug abuse – chat or call 915 08 588

**Ungdomstelefonen** – Questions about gender, sexuality and identity – [ungdomstelefonen.no](http://ungdomstelefonen.no) – Tel. 400 00 777

**ROS Counselling for Eating Disorders** – [nettros.no](http://nettros.no) – Tel: 948 17 818

**Unge Pårørende (Young Next of Kin)** – Information and chat for young next of kin to somebody suffering with illness, abuse, etc. – [ungeparorende.no](http://ungeparorende.no)

**Slett Meg (Delete Me)** – Guidance for people whose rights have been abused online – [slettmeg.no](http://slettmeg.no) – Tel. 911 29 392

**SANKS** – Sami National Competence Centre for Mental Health and Addiction – mental health care and substance abuse – [sanks.no](http://sanks.no)

## Organisations and associations:

**Mental Helse Ungdom** – [mentalhelseungdom.no](http://mentalhelseungdom.no)

**Skeiv Ungdom (Queer Youth)** – [skeivungdom.no](http://skeivungdom.no)

**Norwegian Organisation for Children in Care** – [barnevernsbarna.no](http://barnevernsbarna.no)

**Angstringen** – [angstringen.no](http://angstringen.no)

**Eating Disorder Association (SPISFO)** – [spisfo.no](http://spisfo.no)

**Norwegian Bipolar Association** – [bipolarforeningen.no](http://bipolarforeningen.no)

**ADHD Norway** – [adhdnorge.no](http://adhdnorge.no)

**Norwegian Autism Association** – [autismeforeningen.no](http://autismeforeningen.no)

**LEVE Norwegian Society for Suicide Survivors** – [leve.no](http://leve.no)

## Who would you go to?

In several places in the booklet, we recommend that you contact an adult you trust if you need to talk. This can be a parent/guardian, a relative, the school nurse, a teacher or your GP. It could also be a neighbour, a friend's parent, a sports coach or somebody else. Don't give up if the conversation doesn't go the way you want. Try again or try talking to somebody else.

## VIP Talk About It

This booklet has been produced in connection with **VIP Talk About It** – a mental health programme for upper secondary school. VIP Talk About It is used all throughout Norway and was launched in the year 2000 on the initiative of young people with mental health disorders.

The primary goal of VIP Talk About It is for students to learn more about mental health and feelings, and where you can seek help when life becomes difficult. For you as a student, this means making mental health a topic that is discussed in the class room. The programme can be connected to the curriculum topic area of Public Health and Life Skills (FoL).

VIP Talk About It typically launches with a kick-off assembly at school. This is followed by several lessons on mental health in the classroom with a teacher. Finally, the class will receive a visit from resource staff within the health and social care field.

VIP Talk About It is one of several initiatives delivered by VIP Mental Health in Schools. **VIP Buddy Partnerships** is also used in many schools.

**The feeling of bursting with joy**  
**The feeling of not being enough**  
**The feeling of being completely alone**  
**The feeling of being able to do it all**  
**The feeling of being cross with everything and everyone**  
**The feeling of losing yourself**  
**The feeling of being a part of something**  
**That feeling?**