

A guide to **HELP SEEKING AND SOURCES OF HELP**



Developed as part of
ICMR's Multistate Implementation Research Study on Improving
Mental Well Being Among School and College Students





about

HELP SEEKING AND SOURCES OF HELP

Mental health is just as important as physical health. Just as we visit a doctor when we have a cold or cough, it is equally important and completely valid to seek help when we feel emotionally or mentally overwhelmed.

This guide will help you understand when it might be the right time to seek support, where you can find help, and how to take care of both your mind and your heart.



What Does It Mean to Be Healthy?

When we think about being healthy, most of us imagine someone who does not fall sick often, eats nutritious food, plays sports, and is physically active. But health is about much more than just our body. It includes how we think, feel, relate to others, and cope with life's challenges.

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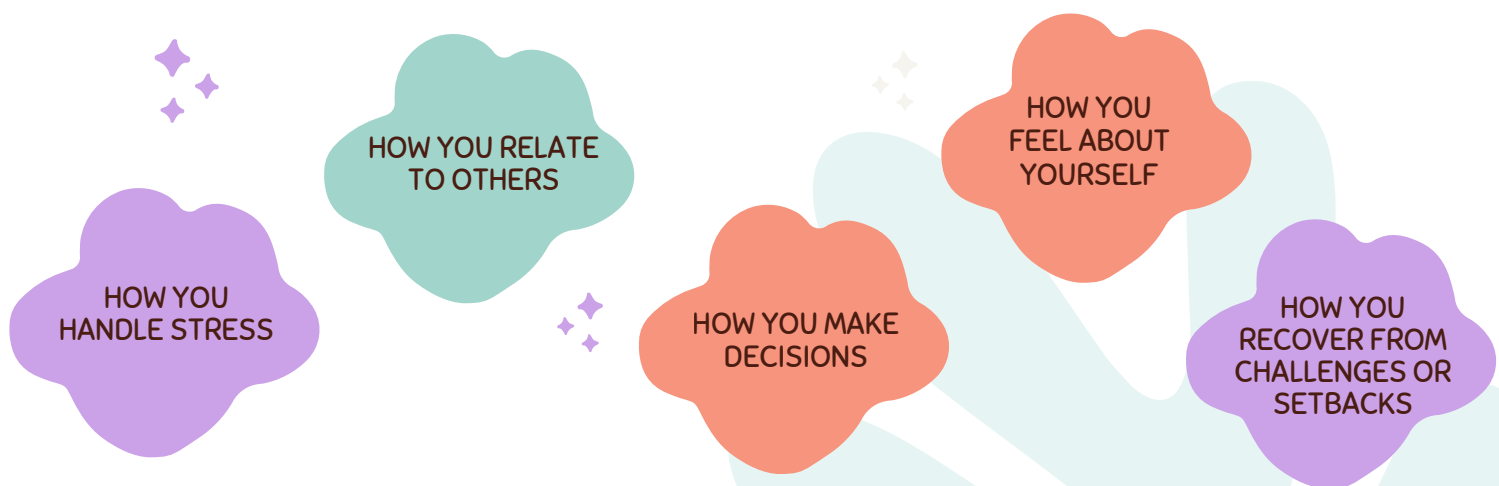
Let us break that down:

- Physical health is your body’s ability to function well.
- Mental health is your emotional, psychological, and social well-being.
- Social health is how well you connect and interact with people.

So, just like we take care of our teeth, eyes, or stomach, we also need to care for our thoughts, emotions, and mental energy.

What is Mental Health?

Mental health includes:



It is natural for your mental health to go up and down depending on what is happening in your life- just like you can have a cold for a few days, you can also feel emotionally unwell for a while. But when those feelings become intense, long-lasting, or start to affect your daily life, it may be time to pay closer attention to them.

Why is Mental Health Especially Important for Students?



As a student, your life is filled with transitions- new classes, exams, relationships, responsibilities, expectations from parents and teachers, and your own dreams and fears. These are big things! Learning how to take care of your mental health now gives you tools to navigate both the present and the future.

Remember: You do not have to be in crisis to seek support. You can ask for help at any stage of your challenge. Remind yourself, you too deserve support and care.

Did You Know?

Mental health challenges are not rare or shameful. One in every seven people in India between the ages of 10 and 19 years experiences mental health concerns. You are not alone.

Why Seeking Help Matters

Mental Health Deserves Attention

Your emotions matter. Struggling does not mean something is wrong with you- it means you are human.

When you get help early, you are able to prevent emotional pain from deepening. Having people around you provide care can also make you feel understood and build resilience, the ability to bounce back and carry on despite the challenge. Receiving support and allowing people around you to help can also expand the ways in which you cope with challenges.

The Mirror Moment

Sit quietly with your journal and write:

“If my best friend felt how I do right now, what would I say to them?”

Now read your answer back- this is also what you deserve to hear.



Asking for Help is a Strength, Not a Weakness

In collectivistic cultures like India, it is common to keep problems within the family or avoid “talking too much” about emotions. But bottling up pain does not necessarily make it disappear- it can also make it feel heavier. Reaching out is brave, wise, and powerful.



Draw Your Backpack

Draw your “mental backpack.” What are you carrying? What are some things you would like to have support with? You can add symbols or photos for people or resources that could help lighten the load.



How Do I Know If I am “Not Okay” Mentally?

There may be many moments one may not feel okay. Sometimes, you can tell that you are not okay if: you may be crying every day, or you feel so anxious you cannot sleep. But often, mental health struggles can be quiet, confusing, and invisible. You might feel “off,” “not like yourself,” or just stuck in a fog.

Take a look at the list shared below: this list contains signs that indicate that you may be struggling with your mental health:

Emotional Signs:

Feeling sad, empty, or hopeless for more than two weeks

Being irritable or angry most of the time without knowing why

Sudden mood swings or emotional outbursts

Feeling worthless, guilty, or full of shame

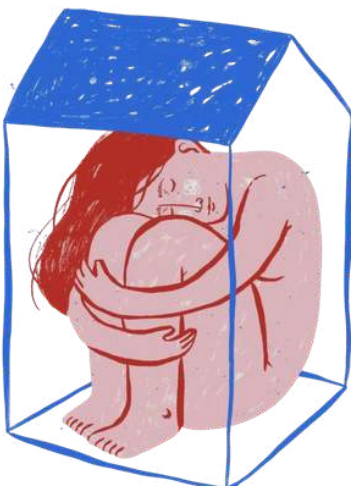
Feeling numb or like nothing matters anymore

Constant worry, fear, or panic for no clear reason

Feeling overwhelmed by small tasks or decisions



Cognitive Signs (related to thinking):



Difficulty concentrating or focusing on studies

Trouble remembering things or following conversations

Racing thoughts or feeling like your brain will not slow down

Negative self-talk (For example, “I am useless”, “Nobody cares about me”)

Overthinking everything or constantly imagining worst-case scenarios

Behavioral Signs:

Withdrawing from friends, family, or social activities

Not enjoying things you used to love (games, music, hobbies)

Avoiding school, skipping classes, or not being able to complete assignments

Becoming overly dependent on screens, social media, or gaming

Changes in speech or becoming extremely quiet or isolated

Crying often, even without knowing why

Wishing for an escape like “I wish I could disappear” or “What is the point of anything?”



Physical Signs (that are linked to emotional distress):

Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much

Losing or gaining weight suddenly without explanation

Frequent headaches or stomach aches with no medical cause

Feeling tired all the time, even after resting

Unexplained body pain, shakiness, or heart racing



Emergency Signs

Following are the signs that suggest that you need urgent support. If you feel any of these apply to you, please seek help at the earliest:

- Thoughts about self-harm or hurting yourself
- Thinking about suicide or saying things like “No one would care if I am gone”
- Expressing hopelessness about the future
- Giving away possessions or writing goodbye messages
- Reckless or risky behavior that puts you or others in danger

If you or someone you know is showing these signs, it is not just “a phase” or something to “just get over.” These are signals that you might need help- and help is available.

To talk to a professional counsellor over a confidential helpline, call TeleMANAS on 14416 or [1800 891 4416](tel:18008914416).



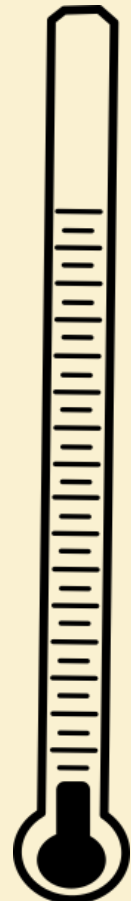
Let's Reflect

“How have I been feeling lately?”

On the thermometer or mood meter shared below, take a few minutes to reflect on your recent experiences and colour the thermometer with how your emotions have felt this past week. For each of the points given below, assign a colour and shade the image to depict your emotions:

- I am doing okay.
- I am managing but not feeling great.
- I am finding it hard to cope.
- I am overwhelmed and do not know where to turn.

You can keep a feeling wheel handy and try to label the emotion you are feeling.



Sources of Help Available



① Trusted Friends and Family

Start with small and convenient steps. Choose someone who has made you feel safe before. You can reach out by saying: "I have been feeling a bit low lately. Can I talk to you about it?"

② School and College Support

You can look for:

- School counselors or student wellness coordinators. You can ask your teacher if your school has one.
- Any teacher you trust



Trusted Circle Activity

Draw a circle. Write names of people (in school or home) you could reach out to. Keep this in a journal or phone wallpaper.



③ Mental Health Professionals



Sometimes, your friends or parents may try their best to support you- but you might still feel stuck, confused, or overwhelmed. Or, if you notice any of the emergency signs mentioned above, it's important to talk to a trained mental health professional.

These are people who have studied and trained to help others understand, manage, and heal from emotional, behavioral, and mental struggles.

- **Counselors/ School Counselor**



They help you explore your feelings, identify problems, and find ways to cope. Think of them as “thinking partners” who guide you through life’s challenges- friendships, stress, family conflicts, exam anxiety, body image, etc. They help in building confidence, communication, emotional regulation and decision making.

- **Counselling Psychologists/Psychotherapist**

They are trained to understand human development and mental health in non-medical settings. They work with people going through emotional difficulties, trauma, life transitions, or psychological distress. They use evidence-based strategies like cognitive-behavioural therapy, humanistic therapy, mindfulness, etc. However, they are not licensed to provide a diagnosis or prescribe medication.



- **Child and Adolescent Therapist**

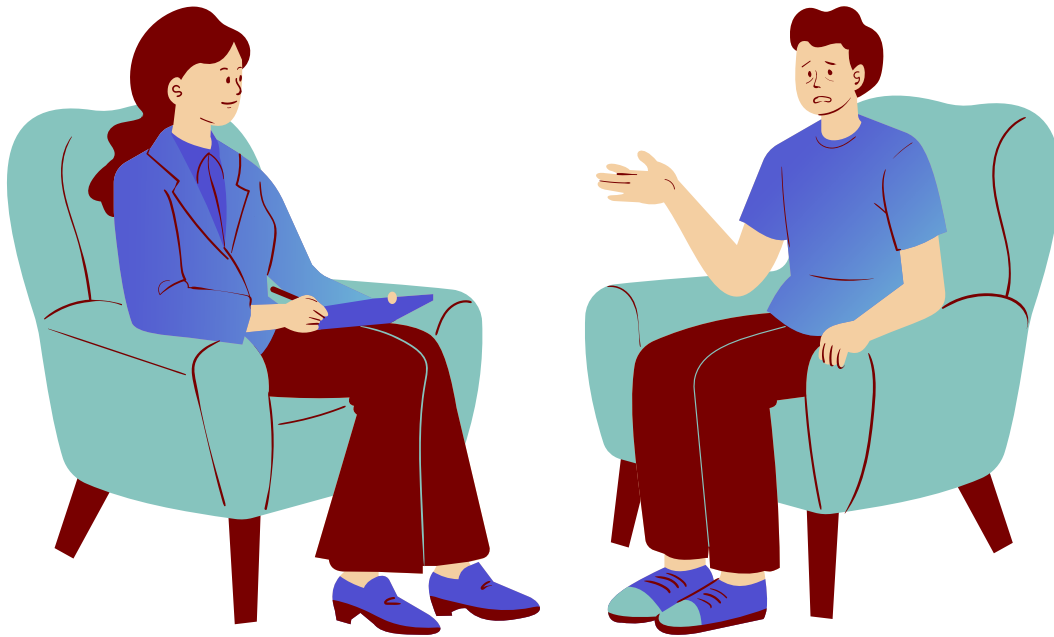


They focus specifically on children and teenagers, and issues that may emerge such as bullying, body image, stress and identity. They understand how growing brains work and how emotional issues show up differently in young people. They may use creative therapies like art, play or storytelling.

- **Clinical Psychologist**

They are highly trained professionals who can diagnose mental health conditions, offer structured therapy, and help with long-term emotional and behavioral issues. They provide assessments for learning disabilities, anxiety, ADHD, depression, etc. and create treatment plans for mental health disorders. They are suitable for students with more serious, ongoing issues like depression, trauma, self-harm, eating disorders, or suicidal thoughts.





- **Psychiatrists**

Psychiatrists are doctors (MBBS + MD Psychiatry) who specialize in understanding the brain and its link to mental health. They can diagnose conditions and prescribe medicines for mental health issues, especially when symptoms affect your ability to function. They work with psychologists for combined treatment.

Important note: Not everyone who feels sad or anxious needs medicine. Many mental health struggles can be handled with therapy alone. Medication is only prescribed when absolutely necessary, such as experiencing extreme mood fluctuations, hallucinations, thoughts of suicide, or having a diagnosis of a mental health illness.



- **Special Educators/ Remedial Therapists**

They work with students who face difficulties in learning due to conditions like dyslexia, ADHD, or slow processing. They often collaborate with counselors and psychologists. They provide one-on-one academic support, tools to improve focus and learning and help in adjusting to the classroom environment or exams.



Decision Guide



Here is a simple guide to help you decide which professional may be a right fit for you.

WHAT YOU ARE EXPERIENCING

General emotional stress, friendships, academic worries



Long-term sadness, anxiety, trauma, or past emotional wounds

Diagnosis or testing for learning/mental health conditions

Suicidal thoughts, hallucinations, or need for medication

Support with study skills and learning challenges

Someone who specializes in teens like me

Not sure what is wrong, just feel "low/off/not myself"



TYPE OF PROFESSIONAL

Counselor or Counselling Psychologist

Counselling Psychologist or Clinical Psychologist

Clinical Psychologist

Clinical Psychologist and/or Psychiatrist

Special Educator

Adolescent Therapist (can be a counselling/clinical psychologist with youth focus)

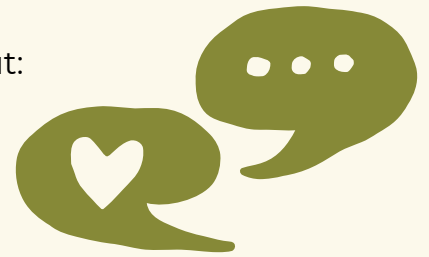
Start with a Counselor or Psychologist



What Happens in a Therapy Session?

Your first session (called an intake session) is mostly about:

- Getting to know you
- Asking questions about what you are going through
- Making you feel comfortable



You can talk, draw, write, or just sit in silence until you are ready. You always have the right to:

- Say “I am not ready to share that yet.”
- Ask questions about your therapist’s qualifications or approach
- Change therapists if you do not feel understood or safe

Remember:

- Choosing a mental health professional is like choosing a pair of shoes- they must fit well, feel safe, and support your journey.
- Sometimes it takes meeting 1–2 different people to find the right match, and that is okay.
- You deserve help, support, and healing.

Finding a Helpline

TeleMANAS:

- Free 24/7 national helpline with trained counselors offering support in multiple Indian languages
- <https://telemanas.mohfw.gov.in/home>

iCall (TISS):

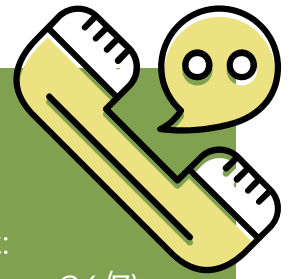
- Call +91-9152987821 or email icall@tiss.edu. Trained counselors available in multiple Indian languages
- <https://www.icallhelpline.org>

Mann Talks:

- Free, text-based chat counseling for youth
- www.manntalks.org

Fortis Mental Health Program

- Offers school workshops and teen-friendly psychologists
- www.fortishealthcare.com



Crisis Helplines and Emergency Support

In moments of intense distress or suicidal thoughts, reach out:

- **TeleMANAS:** 14416 or [1800 891 4416](tel:18008914416) (Free, multiple languages, 24/7)
- **iCall** – 9152987821 (Free and confidential, Mon-Sat, 10 AM–8 PM)
- **AASRA** – 91-9820466726 (24/7 suicide prevention)
- **Vandrevala Foundation Helpline** – 1860 266 2345 or 1800 233 3330
- **Samaritans Mumbai** – 91-84229 84528/29/30
(7 PM – 9 PM daily, English, Hindi)

Save at least two helplines in your phone. Share them with friends too—you never know who might need them.

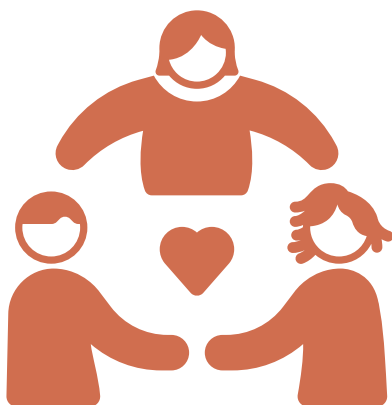
Self-Help While You Wait for Support

“What can I do now if I cannot get help immediately?”

Sometimes you recognize that you need support, but you:

- Do not have access to a therapist immediately
- Are waiting for your appointment
- Are nervous about asking someone for help
- Feel like no one is available right now

There are many ways to take care of your emotional and mental health while you wait for help. Think of these as your mental first-aid tools- you can use them when emotions feel too big to hold alone.



1

Build a Personal Support System

Have 3–5 people in your life who can be “your team.” Each can offer something different—listening, problem-solving, distraction, or hugs.

2 Emotional Regulation



Try these calming activities:

- Deep Breathing: Inhale for 4, hold for 7, exhale for 8
- Grounding: Name 5 things you see, 4 feel, 3 hear, 2 smell, 1 taste
- Journaling: Write about what is bothering you, without censoring
- Body Scan: Close your eyes and mentally scan your body from head to toe. Notice where you feel tight, warm, heavy, etc. No need to fix- just notice.

My Calm Corner

Design your own “calm space” at home with soft lighting, a plant, a journal, music, or art materials. You can also put up affirmations, photographs of people or places that make you feel safe and helpful reminders.



3 Coping with Negative Thoughts

Thoughts and emotions are deeply connected- so by noticing, challenging, and shifting your thoughts, you can reduce distress.

- Name the Thought: Sometimes the mind whispers things like:

“No one cares about me.”

“I always mess everything up.”

“I will never feel better.”

Start by writing the thought down. Giving it a name makes it feel smaller and separate from you.

- Challenge the Thought: Ask yourself:

Is this 100% true?

What would I say to a friend who had this thought?

Can I find one reason this thought might not be accurate?

- Flip the Thought: Turn a harsh thought into a kinder, more balanced one. For example, “No one would care if I disappeared” can be flipped to “Some part of me wishes someone would notice- I think I need support”.

4 Self-Care

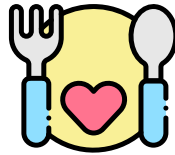
When you feel low, even small tasks like brushing your teeth or eating breakfast feel hard. But doing these helps your brain get the message: "I matter."



Get some sunlight on your face



Move your body gently (walk, stretch, dance)



Eat a simple, balanced meal



Drink water



Go to bed on time or take a nap

5 Create a Calm Kit

Make a box, pouch, or folder (digital or real) with things that soothe you. This can include:

- Your favorite music playlist
- A journal and pen
- Soothing scents (lavender oil, rose water)
- Positive notes from friends
- Photos that make you smile
- List of emergency contacts and coping strategies



6 Taking Care of Yourself While Supporting Others

Sometimes distress comes suddenly. A personal plan helps you stay grounded and safe. Write it out or save it in your phone notes. Crisis plan includes:

- Three people you can call or text
- One safe activity/ Coping steps (draw, nap, shower, music)
- One mantra or quote ("I have survived hard days before.")
- Two helpline numbers
- One object that calms you (photo, stuffed toy, journal)
- My warning signs: "I know I am not okay when I start ____."
- What has helped me in the past
- One reason I would like to keep going



Remember

You matter and your struggles are valid. Asking for help does not make you weak. It makes you someone who is choosing healing over hiding. You do not have to wait until you are falling apart to take care of your mental health. You are not alone.



Developed by
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