



**Elizabeth Glaser
Pediatric AIDS Foundation**
Fighting for an AIDS-free generation

A Resource for Young People on Mental Health: How to connect with your feelings and tips on supporting others struggling with difficult feelings

From the Committee of African Youth Advisors

Let's start by understanding what mental health is. Mental health encompasses the state of our mind—how we feel, how we handle situations, how we relate to other people, and how we make choices.

Stigma or misconceptions around mental health exist and can make it hard to discuss it, open up about challenges, or seek help. Stigma comes in many forms. For example, there is a shame that can be associated with needing mental health support, or that different mental health conditions are signs of weakness. The root of stigma in most cases is a misunderstanding of the facts and it's important to understand that being healthy and seeking help to keep your body and mind healthy is important for everyone in whatever form is best for them.

It is important to keep your mental health in good shape to ensure you are feeling the best you can and living your life to the fullest potential. It is *completely normal* to feel down sometimes—this happens to everyone. This can happen because of a stressful or difficult school, personal or social situations, or other reasons. Your difficult feelings or worries can go away on their own, but if they stay for a long time, it may be helpful to talk to a person you trust for advice and support.

Signs of good mental health	Signs of mental health challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good amounts of energy • Sleeping well • Happy and content • Able to have meaningful relationships • Able to manage stress • Able to manage your health by taking your medication and going to regular appointments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling tired, fatigued • Not sleeping well • Irritable or mood swings • Feeling hopeless, depressed, or worried often • Feeling overwhelmed • Having a hard time breathing • Difficulty connecting with people • Forgetting to take medication or go to the clinic

There are other important health challenges you should be aware of. The challenges differ from person to person, but it is good to be aware of them to identify and connect with the appropriate care and support. *Everyone deserves to live a full, positive, happy life.*

Understanding different mental health conditions:

Depression	Anxiety	Suicidal
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• feeling little joy in life• feeling down• hopeless• low self esteem	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• feeling worried a lot• feeling nervous• powerless• having a sense of looming panic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• feeling desperate and not willing to live anymore and thinking of terminating their lives (suicidal)• severe untreated depression and anxiety may lead to suicidal thoughts or actions



First and foremost: YOU MATTER! Your life has immense and unique value and potential! Learn to love yourself the way you are!

What to do when you feel or experience any of these symptoms or other negative experiences or feelings:

- Tell someone you trust—this can be a friend, family member, partner, faith leader, teacher, or health care provider
- If you feel more comfortable talking about it anonymously, there are resources to do that as well (check the end of this document)
- Find an activity that brings you joy and try to do that often (reading, poetry, games, art, sport)
- Stay connected with people you love
- Try to keep a regular school/work and sleep schedule
- Connect with a health care provider like a counselor, doctor, or psychologist
- Get physical exercise regularly

Advice from young people on managing their mental health:

“We can manage our mental health by talking about our feelings, this helps stay in good mental health and deal with times when we feel troubled”

“You will not find good mental health in stagnation”

“[Talking] can help reduce stress”

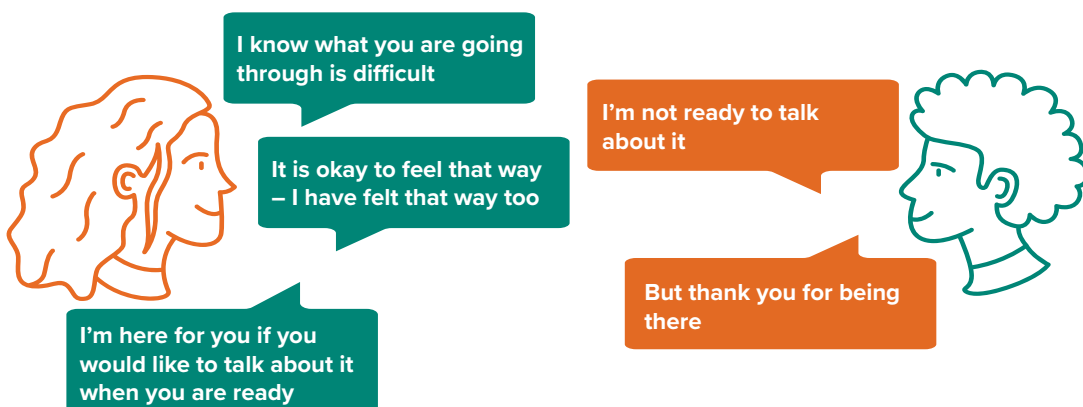
Supporting peers:

Your friends or peers can struggle with difficult feelings or thoughts and express them in different ways—you may notice they are exhibiting some of the signs described above and it can be hard to know what to say or how to act.

It is important to know you cannot force someone to share how they are feeling with you, however, simply being there physically or virtually and letting them know you care about them and are here for them is extremely valuable.

Here are a few tips to help if you find yourself in a similar position:

Be a source of support:	Let them know you are there for them no matter what and they can come to you or talk to you if and when they are ready.
Listen openly and without judgment:	Allow them to talk openly and freely without pressuring them to share.
Be patient:	It takes time to resolve personal struggles. The best thing you can do is continuously be there for your friend.
Acknowledge their feelings :	Recognize their feelings and make sure they know it is okay to feel that way, do not minimize or dispel what they share with you.
Provide ongoing reassurance:	Stay connected—whether in person or virtually (SMS, WhatsApp) to check in and make sure they know you are there.



A few resources for additional information and to connect for support

Resource	Creator	Link to access
A free, accessible WhatsApp based chat for anyone who wants to connect with a trained provider	<i>Friendship bench</i>	https://www.friendshipbenchzimbabwe.org/i-mind
A free app to download with workbooks and materials on self-care	<i>Positive Konnections</i>	https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.health.positive_konnections
Mental health Anxiety (info sheet)	<i>Zvandiri</i>	https://www.africaid-zvandiri.org/_files/ugd/369a38_2c544198fa424e3cb082b70f4b26fe5d.pdf
Mental health Depression (info sheet)	<i>Zvandiri</i>	https://www.africaid-zvandiri.org/_files/ugd/369a38_71688155cfb9415e8a6075105d5699bf.pdf
What are mental health conditions (info sheet)	<i>Zvandiri</i>	https://www.africaid-zvandiri.org/_files/ugd/586349_3488c9e8d63f47399dab7d7be40a2b97.pdf
Depression and Anxiety (animation)	<i>Amaze</i>	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wI9U8cDqv9c
Puberty: Feeling Depressed, Happy, and Other Emotions (animation)	<i>Amaze</i>	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mAPLTaRM48Y