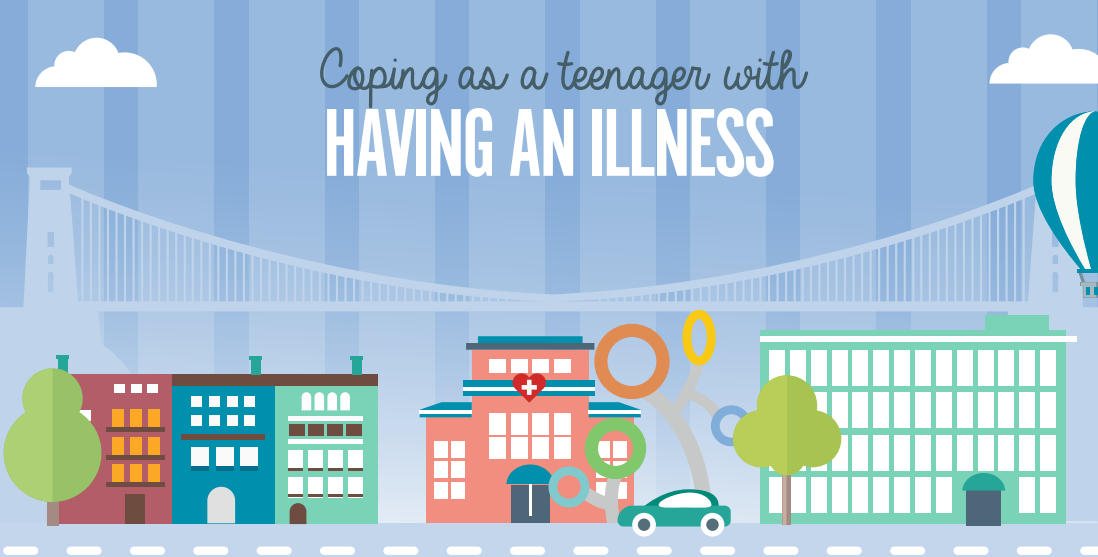


Coping as a teenager with **HAVING AN ILLNESS**



Having an illness might feel like being on an emotional rollercoaster. You might be experiencing all sorts of feelings and emotions and sometimes it can be hard to pinpoint why you are feeling that way. The best thing to remember is that feeling like this is absolutely normal. There is no right or wrong way to feel.



This toolkit will describe some emotions that you might be experiencing and explain why opening up and talking about them is important.

Top tips and strategies

Don't bottle it up – open up

Talking about how you feel can really help. You might find out that what you are feeling is normal and your friends, family and healthcare team can find ways to help you cope.

If talking is hard then you can write a letter, email or blog. You can find cards and songs that say what you feel or write signs or pictures to leave in your bed or bedroom door. You can also try writing a journal as sometimes writing down how you feel can help. You can keep this to yourself or share parts of it with people that you trust.

Here are a number of feelings that you might have...

Being positive

Your illness and treatment is part of your life but you are more than your illness. You can find things to help you stay positive, this might be remembering to be hopeful or spending time with particular people or doing particular activities. Try and do something each day that you enjoy. You may also be looking forward to having treatments that will help you feel more like yourself and help you get back to your life. It can help to think about the reasons for your treatment and hospital admission and how the medical teams are working hard to help you feel better or help with your symptoms.

What if I don't feel positive?

It's okay to have days when you feel upset and low and it can help you feel better to know some days will feel better than others. It's okay to say this out loud. Having an illness and treatments can feel worrying and upsetting at times. Talking about it can release stress and let people know that you need support and help.

Sad

Sadness can come and go when you're ill or in hospital. There are lots of reasons why you might feel sad: changes to your lifestyle, to your body, missing home, school and friends you might also feel a bit lonely too. Think about the things that help make you feel better; it could be having a good chat with a friend or snuggling up with your favourite book. If you feel like the feelings of sadness persist and don't come and go then it's important to ask for support. Perhaps speak to your healthcare team or GP and they can refer you to the right person or service.



Feeling frustrated and angry

Being ill and having treatments can feel frustrating, as you may feel that you are missing out on things that you enjoy. You may have asked yourself the question “why is it me that has an illness?” It’s natural to have these questions and it’s important to remember that “it’s not your fault.” You might have found that you easily get annoyed at times. Think about ways that have helped you feel calmer in the past and use these if and when you feel frustrated. You might find it helpful to:

Talk to someone close about what’s making you feel angry and frustrated, just talking can help you feel better.

Exercise – this can help reduce anger and stress levels. Make sure you check with your doctor or nurse first to find out what is most suitable.

Have a cry – this enables a release of emotions and can help you feel better.

Listen to music – find out what works for you.

Focus on your breathing.

Uncertain

Illnesses can bring up questions of uncertainty. Thinking about lots of possible outcomes of hospital treatment can feel overwhelming. Instead of focusing on the uncertain aspects of our lives, take control by focusing on the certain things and do things that make you feel good and relaxed. Ask questions about practical aspects of your treatment if this would help.

It can help to:

Learn more about your condition and treatment – you might feel more in control and less worried if you understand more about what to expect with your treatment and hospital stay. If you have any worries, questions, concerns or anything that you don't understand, please ask.

Get involved – you can take control of your healthcare and decisions about treatment. Try taking a bigger part in discussions around your health and asking about why treatments are recommended and how they will help you. You can make decisions with your healthcare team about what will happen next.

Set goals – think about what is important to you in your life today and in the longer term. Think about who can help you with your goals and what you need to do to take a step towards them

Get organised – try writing a list and planning how to reach your goals and what things like hobbies and seeing friends you want to plan into your week.

See your friends – spending time with people that support you and help you laugh, cry and have fun can really help. Make a list of who these people are and take time to contact them.

WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE?

- Your healthcare team are there to help support you with both your physical health and other things that are going on for you. They may be able to help provide support and ideas or know of additional services in the hospital that can help you.
- Some teams have a psychologist as part of the team who you can talk to about what is going on. They will have an understanding of stress and be able to help you think and process what is going on and find ways to manage. A member of your healthcare team can make a referral.



LINKS TO APPROPRIATE RESOURCES

- 1 'Off the Record' is an organisation that runs groups for young people, you can find out more at:
www.otrbristol.org.uk/what-we-do/
or by texting: 07896 880 011
- 2 Alongside this they have produced an online resource called 'The resilience lab' which can be accessed at:
www.otrbristol.org.uk/the-resilience-lab/
- 3 Have a look at the other toolkits in this series, they provide information and ideas to help support you further.
- 4 You might also find information on the 'NHS Go' app that you can download onto your phone.
- 5 <https://youngminds.org.uk/>



These toolkits have been written by NHS clinical psychologists and neuropsychologists working for University Hospitals Bristol. They have been co-designed with service users and healthcare staff. These toolkits are only intended to provide general advice and information. Please discuss your individual needs with your doctor or specialist nurse. If you would like more information about psychology services please go to:

<http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/support-for-patients/psychological-health-services/>

We would like to thank patients and other healthcare staff for their contributions to this toolkit.

For access to other patient toolkits please go to the following address:

<http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/support-for-patients/psychological-health-services/resources/>

For this leaflet in large print or PDF format, please email patientleaflets@uhbristol.nhs.uk

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