

TOP 5 MENTAL HEALTH APPS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Words by the Youthscape
Mental Health Team



Whilst we realise that you can get an app for just about anything these days. Some are helpful, some less so...

However, apps can be a fantastic, easy-to-access way for a young person to learn the skills to self-manage overwhelming feelings and symptoms around a variety of mental health challenges they may face. They can help a young person practice and master techniques that can help them reduce symptoms of anxiety and low mood, alongside tracking how they feel throughout the month and highlight new things they can try whilst reflecting on what works for them.

There are many apps available that offer support around a range of different wellbeing and mental health topics BUT how can we know which are useful and most likely to benefit our young people?

It's important to say that no app can take the place of a consultation with a health care professional and it's important that we don't signpost young people to apps as a substitute for this if they are really struggling with their mental or physical health. However, it can serve as a low level therapeutic tool to complement the support they are already receiving, or provide access to a set of ideas they can put in place to support their own wellbeing from home while they are doing okay. Apps can also provide support in the wait for treatment, providing young people with a range of immediate suggestions and techniques they can try to make themselves feel better.

It's never a bad time to think about our mental health and learn to put good tools in place!

Developing skills to self-regulate (find ways to calm down our breathing and identify effective distractions and releases for difficult emotions) can go a long way to make a young person feel more in control. Many of the free apps currently available offer a range of techniques based around CBT (cognitive behaviour therapy) that can help challenge negative thought patterns and help young people reflect and track their moods throughout the week. This can be helpful in identifying triggers- the events in their week that may escalate negative or challenging feelings or fuel certain behaviours like self-harm or panic attacks.

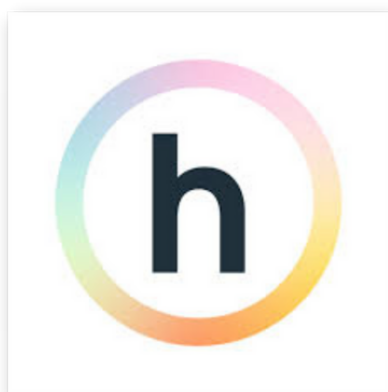
Apps that offer calming tools, such as breathing exercises and mindfulness techniques, can be a fantastic resource for those who find themselves away from home when they begin to feel anxiety rising or can feel themselves becoming overwhelmed. Having tools and methods with them to help calm down or distract from a wave of panic, can be key in helping them feel safe and return to a place of calm.

We find that in our work with young people (especially through our online work of Alumina) the subject of wellbeing and mental health apps comes up frequently- however with so many to choose from, how can we know which ones to recommend? To help, the mental health team at Youthscape have put together a list of the top 5 apps that they would recommend and how these can be used as an effective and supportive tool for young people.



So, here's 5 apps you could suggest...

Name of app: Happify



What's it for: Happify is an app to help users reduce stress, anxiety and negative thinking, and improve emotional well-being.

How it helps: The app was developed by experts in the field of CBT, psychology and healthcare professionals to provide young people with their own personalised track of activities suited to the specific emotional challenges and mental health symptoms they are struggling with. When you first open the app a therapy Bot (digital chat function) takes you through a series of easy to answer questions that helps highlight the themes that may help, interest and support you by providing tools to help in that area. Examples of track themes can be anything from managing stress, improving sleep through to challenging negative thinking and facing social situations- so there's a real mix of subjects to suit your needs.

Each section offers a range of articles, activities and meditation and mindfulness techniques that you can gradually work through in your own time. The app also offers a series of exercises and reflections around six key core areas that can help boost your happiness levels- from activities to help you explore thankfulness and generosity through to empathising with others and savouring the moments of each day.

Conclusion: Overall Happify is a really helpful app with plenty of activities available on the free version (a paid upgrade is available and opens further content). We would recommend this for slightly older young people 16+ as some of the areas are quite wordy and not as visually exciting as other apps on the market. The advice and support it offers seems reliable and many young people seem to find this a helpful tool.

Name of app: Mindshift

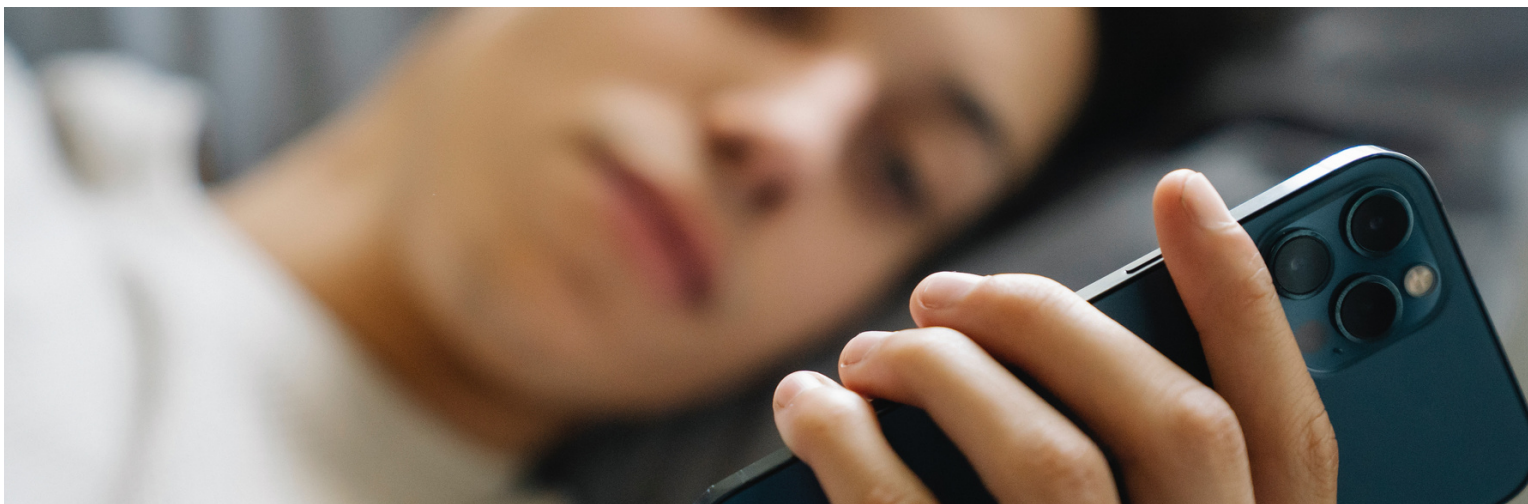


What's it for: MindShift is an app created to provide tools based on cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and information to young people experiencing anxiety.

How it helps: Mindshift is an app developed by The Anxiety Disorders Association of British Columbia that helps a young person explore tools that can help reduce levels of anxiety. It gives a young person space to track how they are feeling over each week whilst learning techniques in the chill zone to help calm themselves down when anxiety is building, such as breathing, muscle relaxation and visualisation. Alongside giving users support for more generalised anxiety the app also focuses on key areas such as perfectionism, social anxiety, performance anxiety, worry, panic, and conflict which is really helpful and can help set goals for specific challenges that young people may be facing. Within the app there is a journaling function where worries can be recorded, challenged and balanced which is a great skill to help young people reflect and create a plan moving forward for when they next feel this way.

A great feature within the free app is the option of joining the Mindshift community page where a young person can anonymously enter a moderated community of other users to share tips, encourage each other and share experiences. The community is however only available for those 18+ due to the nature of topics covered.

Conclusion: This is a great little app that could be used by young people 14+. It's visually engaging and the content is easy to navigate and broken down into easy to understand sections. The ability to track your anxiety throughout the month is a really helpful tool and having the content customised to suit a users needs is brilliant and makes all the content you see relevant.



Name of app: Calm Harm



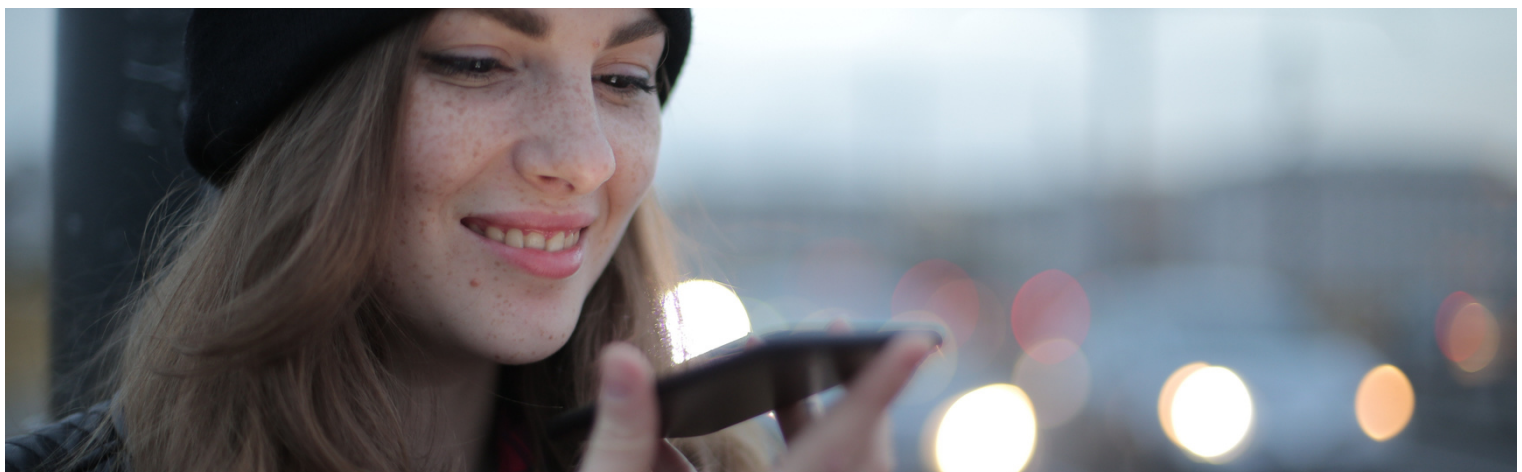
What's it for: CalmHarm is an app that helps young people manage or resist the urge to self-harm as well as providing breathing exercises and a journaling space that helps reflect on and keep track of your experience and triggers.

How it helps: CalmHarm teaches young people how to use Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) tools and skills to manage self-harm urges by helping with increase their ability to cope when in distress. DBT is one of the most evidenced effective techniques for helping adolescents with self-harm. It does this by providing a range of different skills and suggestions for ways to “ride the wave” when an urge comes along. This includes ways to comfort or distract themselves, as well as ways to express or release the emotions/feelings/difficulties they feel and includes a section that also guides individuals through a deep, slow breathing exercise.

The app is very easy to navigate and access making it suited to those moments when individuals feel overwhelmed and may struggle to focus or reach out for the support they want to. CalmHarm helps with this by checking in with young people and helping them “ride the wave” of an urge to harm themselves in short 5- or 15-minute bursts.

Further to the wide range of easy to access tools, Calm Harm is very customisable and user-friendly - providing space for young people to reflect on what may have triggered the urge and take notes on how they felt afterward they have successfully allowed the urge to pass. This section can be password-protected (making it a safe and secure space to journal) and used to keep track of progress and what triggers the individual seems to be facing.

Conclusion: This is a good, free app that provides a lot of tools and support for those struggling with emotional distress and/or self-harm in a simple and accessible space. It is guided by little mascots and aimed at young people through its straightforward design and explanations. Some of the techniques presented may not be possible for all or too simplistic to understand, however this app provides a wide enough range of tools that so will be helpful – and the fact it's based on evidence-based techniques is a big bonus!



Name of app: TellMi (previously MeToo)



What's it for: TellMi is a confidential, moderated support forum for young people and individuals to express their struggles/emotions, seek advice and share in support with other people who are facing similar distress and feelings.

How it helps: TellMi was developed as a safe and moderated way to reach out and give support, and they have found young people react positively to the app and have seen increases in help-seeking behaviours. This app allows individuals to access an anonymous support forum space where they can connect with people who are facing similar situations to them or who can offer alternate ideas and support to them. Individuals can share what they are thinking and feeling and reply to other individuals by expressing they have felt this way or by commenting and offering support and care. Doing this creates a sense of community and can help remind individuals that they are not alone in their thoughts/struggles, that others care about them and that it is good to express built up emotions. The app also provides opportunity to join portals for their specific schools/universities and connect with people through this as well.

All posts go through a moderation process, meaning that unsafe posts are not shared in the community and that counsellors are ready to reach out to individuals when a post highlights something that may be of concern or require additional support. The app also includes easy links to Crisis lines and services as well as education and resources for specific topics people may be discussing or struggling with.

Conclusion: TellMi provides a nice and anonymous community where people can share their experiences and advice. It is open to everyone but recommended for young people and share posts within similar age categories. The support forum style may be more appropriate for older teenagers but is open to anyone over the age of 11. Some young people report finding this app really useful and that having a space to share helps them as they face situations that they are struggling with.



Name of app: Smiling Mind



What's it for: A daily mindfulness and meditation guide to keep your mind healthy and help a young person deal with pressure and stress. It also has sections to support you as a professional or parent.

How it helps: Smiling mind is an app that has been developed by psychologists and educators in Australia to encourage users to use meditation and mindfulness techniques to bring daily balance to your life and keep your mind healthy in the way you would your body.

You begin by personalising your experience, highlighting the areas you would like support with such as sleep or managing anxiety and it gives you a choice of mediation exercises and breathing techniques to engage, all of which help re-focus your thoughts and calm your mind down. The app also offers easy-to-understand explanations around what exactly meditation and mindfulness is alongside giving users the option to set daily reminders for regular exercises. Each time you go onto the app you log what your current mood is using emojis and this tracks your mood patterns over the month on a simple graph.

Conclusion: This app is a popular one with young people and quite a few have recommended this to us! Design wise, the colour scheme is calming, reflecting the content and the app easy to navigate around. There's plenty of great content as easy to try techniques so helpful for all ages. Within the app it offers specific content for younger and older teens so is suitable for most ages of young people- it also caters for adults. It provides some great tools to help young people stop, breathe, calm down, and handle problems more effectively.

