



North East and
North Cumbria

THE LITTLE BOOK OF USEFUL STUFF

YOUR TOOLKIT FOR A HEALTHY LIFE

WELCOME

Welcome to The Little Book of Useful Stuff – your toolkit for a healthy life.

Teen and early adult years can be a confusing time for us all. What should I expect during puberty? How do I get medical help? What does safer sex mean? What if it's all a bit embarrassing and I'm not sure who to ask?

The Little Book of Useful Stuff is packed with handy tips to help you keep safe, stay healthy and make informed decisions about your life. Written by health professionals, it's information you can trust.

It's easy to use – and it points you to places you can find out more or ask for help. Just use your phone to scan the QR codes, use the contact details, or visit the Healthier Together Website to find what you need:

www.nenc-healthiertogether.nhs.uk

We'd like to thank all the young people and families in Gateshead who shared their ideas and feedback, and health professionals across the region who contributed to the content of the book.



Scan QR codes
with your phone



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GETTING MEDICAL HELP

Your GP practice can help with a range of needs, from health concerns to bullying, body changes or sexual health. Depending on your needs, you might see a practice nurse, pharmacist or mental health worker.

If you're 13 or over, you can make an appointment. You don't need permission from your parent or carer. It's confidential: nothing you tell your doctor or practice staff will be passed on, unless they think you or someone else are at risk of being harmed.

You can be honest with your doctor. They won't judge you. If you don't understand what they're saying, it's OK to ask. You can ask for a male or female doctor if you prefer.



You can find your local practice at **www.nhs.uk**. You can make appointments by phone, online (you'll need to register for this first), or by asking at the front desk.





→ **School nurses** work to keep you healthy and safe. They can also help you find mental health support, make healthy lifestyle changes, and support with a range of physical health needs



→ **Pharmacists** are highly trained and provide free, confidential advice on minor illnesses from sickness to hay fever. Pharmacies have a quiet area if you need to speak in private



→ **NHS 111:** If you have an urgent need which is not life-threatening, NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, to assess your symptoms and help you get the right help, first time. Just visit **www.111.nhs.uk** or call **111**

In an emergency, call 999.

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KEEPING HEALTHY

Healthy eating and exercise

What we eat affects how we feel and how healthy we are. A healthy diet gives you the nutrients you need to grow, be active, and do the things you love.

- **Eat regular meals:** It's tempting to skip meals when we're rushing, but regular meals are best
- **6-8 drinks a day:** Mostly water to keep your body going
- **Exercise:** Aim for an hour a day if you're under 18. That can be a mix of things like walking or cycling but should include something to get your heart rate up, like running, dancing or swimming. Regular exercise helps you sleep better and reduces stress



Find out
more about
healthy eating



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A good night's sleep

Good sleep allows your body and mind to recharge, and to feel refreshed and alert when you wake up.

- Keep to a regular bedtime – get your body into a rhythm
- Have some wind-down time reading, having a bath or listening to something relaxing, then keep your room dark overnight
- Switch off screens an hour before bed – if you wake up, don't look at your phone
- Avoid caffeine for six hours before bed – and remember, it sneaks into lots of drinks, including coffee, tea and fizzy pop
- Fresh air and exercise help us sleep better



If your tiredness doesn't get better with sleep, this is what doctors can call fatigue. This can happen after viral infections or be caused by other health problems. If you're worried, speak to your GP.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Headaches

Most headaches are easily treated, but some are severe and may be a sign of something more serious.

- **Tension headaches** are the most common. They can feel like a pressure around your head and can be caused by stress, too much screen time, or muscle strain from sitting awkwardly
- **Acute headaches** come on suddenly, usually with cold symptoms, a temperature, or general aches. It often feels like a sharp throbbing pain. Paracetamol and Ibuprofen can help



If you have a stiff neck – where you can't touch your chin to your chest – or struggle to look at lights due to a severe headache and possibly a temperature, get checked by a healthcare professional straight away.

- **Migraines** often start with flashing lights in your eyes (known as an aura), then severe pain in your head – often on one side but sometimes both. You may feel dizzy, sick, and need to lie down in the dark. Plenty of water and pain killers at the start may help stop a migraine becoming severe



Top tips for preventing headaches:

- Switch off screens an hour before bed
- Take a screen break every 20 minutes
- Cut down on caffeine and alcohol
- Get fresh air and exercise
- Eye strain can cause headaches, so a trip to the optician may help
- Drink two litres of water a day and have regular meals

You need to get medical help if your headaches:

- Interfere with day-to-day life
- Wake you from sleep
- Cause changes in your vision
- Make you feel sick, but feel better when you stand up
- Happen after a head injury
- Don't get better, or if you need medicine several times a week



Toilet trouble

Around half a million UK teenagers have a bladder or bowel condition. For some people, wetting or dribbling of urine during the day, bedwetting, constipation or soiling may have been a problem throughout childhood. Some people try very hard to hide the problem, or may have faced bullying.

You can ask for help – and there are things you can do to help improve things.

Handy to know:

- Teenage girls should drink about 1.5 – 2.5 litres of water-based drinks a day. Teenage boys should drink about 2 – 3 litres. This keeps your wee diluted and the colour of straw. Concentrated urine can irritate the bladder's lining and make wetting problems worse
- Water-based drinks keep poo soft, and help prevent constipation, soiling and urinary tract infections. Girls should always wipe from front to back in one go
- Go to the toilet as soon as you feel the need. Healthy bowel movements are soft and easy to pass, ranging from four times a week to three times a day. Less often could mean you're constipated – which can be painful
- Avoiding going for a poo makes things worse by causing a build-up. Fresh, watery poo may then leak around the lump of hard poo into your underwear



- If you avoid going for a long time, the build-up continues and your rectum may stretch and take a while to shrink back to its usual size. This makes it harder for your body to sense when you need to go
- Normal healthy urine habit is between six and eight straw-coloured wees a day
- You'll need more water during physical activities, or if it's hot. Fizzy or caffeinated drinks can make symptoms worse
- Eat a balanced diet, with lots of fruit, vegetables and cereals

Bedwetting

Bedwetting happens when the message saying 'I need to wee' doesn't get from your bladder to your brain. There are lots of reasons this might happen:

- **Constipation:** A full bowel puts pressure on your bladder. To avoid constipation, eat a varied diet and drink plenty of water
- **Overactive bladder:** This is when your bladder gets 'twitchy' and tells your brain to empty before it's full
- **Not enough vasopressin:** This hormone tells your kidneys to make less wee at night. Your doctor can give medication for this



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If you're worried, speak to your school nurse or GP.

Diabetes

Diabetes is a serious condition where your blood glucose level is too high. It can happen when your body doesn't produce enough insulin, if your insulin isn't effective, or you can't produce it at all.

Type 1 diabetes is the most common in children and young people. It's not related to diet or how you live. It's a lifelong condition where your body can't make insulin, and needs lifelong treatment.

Type 2 diabetes is more common in adults, but affects some children, particularly if you have a family history of it, or come from an Asian or Afro-Caribbean background. Type 2 diabetes is when your insulin can't work effectively, or you can't produce enough.

Being overweight and doing little physical activity can contribute to the risk of type 2. Early treatment, lifestyle changes and support can make a big difference.

In all types of diabetes, the initial symptoms are increased thirst, going to the toilet more, being tired and losing weight. Other symptoms can be skin problems, blurred vision and constipation.

In type 1, if these signs are not recognised the person may become very sick with vomiting, abdominal pain, rapid breathing and cold hands and feet and be less responsive. In this situation, call 999.

Find out more at www.diabetes.org.uk



Looking after your skin

During puberty, we produce more hormones. This means more oil in our skin, acne and hair growth around the groin and under your arms.

Some people get stretch marks from rapid growth. Usually dark pink or purple, these fade with time. This is completely normal.

Acne

Most young people get acne at some stage. It usually resolves itself by late teens or early twenties, but it sometimes goes on longer. Often it's just a few spots on face, neck, back and chest, but more severe acne can cause scarring.

Your hormones can cause an excess of oil, while dead skin cells clog up the follicles. Oil then builds up, producing blackheads and whiteheads.

Everyone's skin contains acne bacteria, but the oil build-up helps them multiply, causing red or pus-filled spots. Skin may feel hot, painful and tender. Larger spots can burst or may heal up without bursting. Sometimes acne is triggered by medication, contraceptives or bodybuilding tablets.



Not all spots are acne, so if it looks unusual, consult your doctor.



Dealing with acne

There's no cure, but treatments can help:

- Try not to pick or squeeze your spots!
This makes them worse and causes scarring
- Take action as soon as acne appears.
Try over-the-counter products first. Ask your pharmacist for advice
- If acne cream irritates your skin, stop for a few days. Then try less often and build up gradually
- Make-up may help your confidence. Use oil-free or water-based products. Non-comedogenic means it shouldn't cause blackheads or whiteheads; non-acnegenic means it shouldn't cause acne
- Cleanse skin and remove make-up with mild soap or a gentle cleanser and water, or an oil-free soap substitute. Scrubbing too hard can make it worse
- There's little evidence that foods cause acne, but your health will benefit from a balanced diet and plenty of fruit and veg

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Eczema

Eczema is a common condition that often runs in families. Like asthma and hay fever, it's linked to increased immune system activity. It causes red, dry, itchy skin which can become weeping, blistered, crusted and thickened.

Sometimes it affects sleep, making you tired and irritable. Scratching can lead to infection and scarring. Things like heat, wool, pets, stress and some cleaning products can make eczema worse. There's no cure, but there are ways of controlling it – like careful moisturising, avoiding perfumed products and avoiding wool on your skin.

Find out more at www.eczema.org

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Psoriasis

Psoriasis makes your skin inflamed, scaly and itchy. It can develop at any age, but it's more likely if someone in your family has it too.

Psoriasis causes areas of raised inflamed skin, often with a thick white scale. This can look different, depending on your skin pigment type.

There's no cure, but most people can be treated so that the symptoms are longer a problem.

To find out more, seek advice from your GP or visit www.psoteen.org.uk

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Moles

Moles can be found anywhere on the skin, including hands, genitals, eyes and scalp.

If you have a lot of moles, check regularly for any changing, bleeding or scabbing – or just looking different. You might need to photograph them to keep track.

Protect yourself from too much sun, and avoid sunbeds. In strong sun, protect your skin with good clothing, a hat, sunglasses and sunscreen.

Skin cancer is not common in young people. It normally presents as a spot, freckle or mole that's different to the skin around it. Most skin cancers can be successfully treated if found early.

Asthma

Asthma is a common airway condition where your immune system reacts to pollen, dust, weather changes or illness.

A preventer inhaler is used daily to help prevent symptoms. A reliever inhaler is used for a short time to relieve symptoms. Some people also need tablets.

Asthma often runs in families. If you have hay fever, eczema or allergies, the chances of getting asthma are higher.

Smoking and pollution make symptoms worse. **If you think you might have asthma, ask your GP.**



Asthma attacks

An asthma attack is when airways become swollen and inflamed, and it's hard to breathe. Some people use an asthma action plan to keep safe in the event of an attack.

Symptoms of an asthma attack include:

- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Tight chest, coughing and wheezing
- Having difficulty talking
- Change in colour of skin
- Increased heart rate and breathing rate
- Drowsiness or losing consciousness



If you think you're having an asthma attack, use your reliever inhaler to help manage the symptoms.

The key to managing an attack is recognising it early and taking action. If you're worried, call 111. In an emergency, call 999.



Allergies

An allergy is the immune system's response to normally harmless things like pollen, foods and dust mites. Allergies happen at any age, but are common in children and often run in families. There are many types of allergy including skin, respiratory, eyes, drugs, and venom allergy (for example, to bee and wasp stings).

Symptoms of an allergic reaction:

- Sneezing, runny or blocked nose
- Red, itchy, watery eyes
- Wheezing and coughing
- Red, itchy rash
- Worsening of asthma or eczema symptoms



If you have a dangerous reaction – trouble breathing, dizziness or fainting – call 999.

Most allergic reactions are mild, but occasionally a severe reaction called anaphylaxis or anaphylactic shock can happen. This is an emergency and needs urgent treatment.

See your GP if you think you have had an allergic reaction. Other things can cause the same symptoms. Your GP can work out whether it's likely to be an allergy, and provide treatment.

If your allergy is particularly severe or it's not clear what you're allergic to, they may refer you to a specialist.



Fainting and dizziness

One in four children and teenagers have fainted at some point. This can be frightening, but it's usually not serious. Most people recover quickly, in less than a minute.

The most common cause is when your blood pressure has dropped, so your brain isn't getting the blood supply it needs.

This can be caused by:

- Getting dehydrated or not eating enough
- Standing for a long time or standing up quickly
- A stress reaction, strong emotions or shock
- Hyperventilating (breathing fast) or overheating

There are usually warning signs a few seconds before:

- Feeling dizzy or light-headed
- Vision going black or blurred
- Ringing in your ears
- A surge of warmth or sweating
- Going pale

If you experience these, sit or lie down with your feet up, and ask someone to get some help and a drink of water.



Sometimes fainting is a sign of an underlying health problem. If you've fainted without a clear trigger, or fainted a few times, see your GP.

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health is how we think, feel and act. Everybody has it and we need to take care of it. Good mental health helps you think positively, feel confident and act calmly.

If you have poor mental health, you might not enjoy things you normally like doing. You might feel sad or angry for longer, or struggle to control the way you feel or behave.

Mental health problems are common. They're not a sign of weakness – it can happen to anyone. People experience them in different ways.

We all feel sad or worried at times – like nerves before an exam or feeling down when a friend moves away.

But sometimes we need a bit more help:

- If the feelings last a long time
- If you always feel low or can't sleep
- If it affects you most days
- If it stops you doing the things you enjoy
- If it feels you can't cope



Living with a mental health problem

Mental health problems can affect many parts of your life, but you can make a difference – try to spot what triggers them for you, like stress or not enough sleep, and make changes.

You can do things that make your mental health better, like meeting friends or playing sport. By taking steps to look after yourself, you can still lead a happy and fulfilled life.

Here's some ways to look after your mental health:

- Work out what makes you feel good
- Find ways to boost your confidence, to feel good about yourself
- Ask for help or support – scan the QR code for more information



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PUBERTY

Puberty happens to everyone, usually between ages 8 and 16. Don't worry if your friends start to change before you – it's normal for some people to experience puberty later than others. These are the changes you will see:

- **Growing hair** under your arms, on your genitals and, if you're male, on your face and chest
- **Sweating more:** This leads to body odour, so you'll need a shower or bath every day, and to use deodorant
- **Skin problems:** There are lots of creams to help with greasy skin, but the most important thing is to keep your face clean. If you get spots, try not to squeeze them – this makes them worse! If you're worried, contact your GP
- **Interest in relationships and sexuality:** It's a natural part of growing up, but can be confusing. See the sexual health section for more
- **Mixed-up feelings:** It's normal to go through different emotions – happy, grumpy, excited – often in a short space of time! The part of your brain which regulates mood is still developing



Female changes

- **Your hips widen:** As your body grows, your hips widen to possibly carry a baby in the future
- **Your breasts grow:** You might feel itchy or uncomfortable when this happens, but it's completely normal
- **Your vulva will develop** and mature and your vagina will start to produce a clear or white liquid (discharge) which is how it keeps clean and healthy



If the discharge is yellow, smells, or your vagina feels itchy, see your doctor as you might have an infection. If you notice more discharge, it may mean your period is about to start.

- **Periods** (menstruation) start during puberty. You may get pains before and during your period. These can usually be treated at home, without time off school. A warm bath or covered hot water bottle on your tummy can help. You may not feel like exercising, but gentle exercise like going for a walk may help

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Male changes

- **Filling out:** Your shoulders get wider, muscles grow and strength increases
- **Your voice 'breaks'**, becoming deeper. During this process, you may find it's very deep one minute and high the next. This is normal
- **Penis and testicles:** Your penis and testicles will grow, and your scrotum will get darker. You may start to get erections – when your penis goes stiff – which can happen at any time

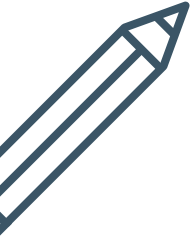
- **Producing sperm:** Your testicles start to produce semen, which contains sperm. This can be released when you have an erection. This is called ejaculation. Once ejaculation happens, if you have sex without protection, you could get someone pregnant. You may have 'wet dreams' when you ejaculate in your sleep – this is completely normal

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SEXUAL HEALTH



Working out if you're ready for sex is one of life's big decisions. Never feel pressured into having sex until you are ready.

If you're considering having sex, here are some things to think about:

- **Only you can decide** if you're ready. It's OK to say no
- **No means no:** Never pressurise someone to be sexually active if they don't want to
- **Communicate:** Talk with your partner about your likes and dislikes. What turns one person on might make the other uncomfortable
- **Safe sex:** Talk about safe sex before you start – find out more on the next page



If you feel uncomfortable talking about these things with your partner, you might not be ready to have sex.



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Safe sex and contraception

Contraception is the way to have safer sex with your partner. If you have unprotected sex, you're at risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or pregnancy.

Condoms are the only form of contraception that can both prevent pregnancy and protect against sexually transmitted infections. There are two types of condoms – external (worn on the penis) or female condoms (worn inside the vagina). Condoms can be used for oral, anal, and vaginal sex, to help protect against STIs that are transmitted through skin-to-skin touching as well as penetrative



sex. Some people have an allergy and need latex-free condoms.

Other types of contraception like the pill, injection or coil can protect against pregnancy, but don't reduce your chances of catching an STI.

Think about which type is right for you and your partner. Your doctor or a sexual health clinic can provide contraception and advice, even if you're under 16. They won't tell anyone, unless they think you're in danger.



If you've had unprotected sex, speak to your school nurse, GP or a sexual health clinic about emergency contraception straight away.



Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

There are many sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and it's easy to be tested for these, even if you have no symptoms. You should test if you change your partner or have unprotected sex (without a condom).

Signs that you might have an STI:

- Unusual discharge, stinging, itching or swelling
- It hurts to wee
- Irregular bleeding from your penis or vagina
- Pain in your stomach, or when you have sex
- Blisters or sores, particularly in the genital area or mouth
- Feeling generally unwell, sick, hot or cold, or having flu-like symptoms



If you have symptoms, get advice from a health professional or sexual health clinic.

Worth knowing: you can have an STI (and pass it on) without knowing it.



Pregnancy

If you think you might be pregnant, take a pregnancy test as soon as possible.

If your test is positive, it's understandable to feel mixed emotions. Think carefully before making any decisions and talk through your options with someone you trust. You can get confidential advice from a GP, practice nurse, sexual health clinic or NHS 111.

It's your decision, but don't ignore the situation. Your options are:

- **Continuing the pregnancy and keeping the baby**
- **Having an abortion**
- **Continuing the pregnancy and having the baby adopted**





If you decide to continue your pregnancy, the next step is to start antenatal care. There are services to help you before and after having your baby.

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If you decide not to continue your pregnancy, talk through your options with a GP or sexual health clinic.

The law and consent

Consent means agreeing to do something. Nobody has the right to make you go further than you want.

You have the right to say no, at any point, whoever you are with. If you want sex but the other person doesn't, you must respect their feelings and stop.

The age of consent for sex in England is 16. Having sex with someone under the age of 16 is against the law.

If someone is drunk or high on drugs, they are not capable of giving consent. Non-consensual sex with a person who is drunk or under the influence of drugs is rape.



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LGBTQ+

Biological sex has to do with our assigned gender, it relates to our genitals and hormones. Gender identity is about how you feel inside. Some people feel that the sex assigned to them at birth is different to the gender they identify with. When biological sex and gender identity don't match up, a person sometimes identifies as transgender.

Sexual orientation means who you're attracted to. There are many sexual orientations, including gay, lesbian, straight, bisexual and asexual.

Gender expression is how people show the world their gender, in how they dress or behave.



It's OK to question your gender. There are LGBTQ+ services to help you think about these things. Please scan the QR code for further information.

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RELATIONSHIPS – GOOD AND BAD

Friends

Having friends is good for us. Friends come and go in our lives, but the most important thing is that they accept you for who you are.

A good friend...

- Is there for you if things get difficult
- Will comfort you when you're upset
- Will laugh with you and make you smile
- Is kind, respectful and listens
- Is trustworthy and tells the truth, even when it's hard to hear
- Encourages you to be a better person and achieve things

They're not a real friend if they...

- Talk behind your back
- Pressure you into things you don't want to do
- Judge you or make you feel bad about yourself
- Aren't there when you need support
- Take advantage, or only hang out with you when they want something



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Find more tips at www.healthforteens.co.uk

Bullying

Bullying is never OK. We don't agree with everyone we meet, but we must respect each other. That can be as simple as leaving them to get on with their life while you get on with yours.

Bullying includes:

- Being called names, teased or made fun of
- Being hit, pushed or kicked
- Having things taken or damaged
- Being ignored, left out, or having rumours spread about you
- Abusive messages or comments online
- Being targeted because of who you are



There's no 'right' answer to bullying, but telling a trusted adult or friend can help, and there are people who offer support. **Speak with a teacher, health professional or call Childline free on 0800 1111.**

Above all, remember that it's not your fault.



Parents splitting up?

Seeing your parents split up is never easy, and might add to other stresses in your life. Try to remember:

- It's not your fault. Relationships are complicated, and parents separate because of their own issues
- It's OK to feel angry, but try not to let it take over. Keep doing the things you enjoy
- Don't be their go-between – that's not your job
- It's OK to tell them how you feel
- Talk to friends, even though it might be hard. Their support can be a real help

**If you're having a hard time,
there are people who can help.
Scan the QR code to find out more.**

**Scan to
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Good relationships

A new relationship can feel amazing. It's exciting to have a new girlfriend, boyfriend, or partner. All relationships have ups and downs, but sometimes things start well and then get more confusing.

This checklist can help you think about your relationship. Do you feel:

- Supported, safe and happy?
- Trusted? Or constantly checked up on?
- Loved and respected? Do you respect each other's boundaries, or always do what they want?
- You can have fun? Are you scared if your partner gets angry?
- If you talk about worries, do they listen? Can you both have a point of view – not one person making all the decisions?

If you're not happy in a relationship – with a partner, friend or a family member – it's best to talk to someone. It's OK to ask for help if things don't feel right.



Abusive relationships

No one should feel pressured to do things they don't want, or feel trapped in a relationship. It can be confusing if it feels like a loving relationship – but only if you behave a certain way. If you feel scared or controlled, it's an abusive relationship.

They might try to isolate you from family and friends because it's easier to control you that way. As they gain power and control, they might threaten you or your friends if you don't do what they want.

If this is happening, speak to someone you trust.

To find out where to get help, scan the QR code.



Signs to look out for:

- Controlling behaviour, like telling you where you can go or what you can wear
- Online abuse, like threatening to post personal pictures
- Snooping on messages
- Making you do something sexual when you don't want to
- Violence

If you're worried that someone is in an abusive situation, reach out to them.



Sexual exploitation

If someone gives you something in return for sexual activities or photos, that's exploitation. Sometimes a person can be 'groomed' into thinking they're in a loving relationship or a great friendship.

You could meet an abuser anywhere – through family, friends, school, social media or online games.

When a young person is being exploited, they are often given things like money, drugs, alcohol, clothes or phones. This usually ends up being in exchange for sexual activities or pictures.

In some cases, they may feel they have no other choice. Someone may lend large amounts of money that can't be repaid, or use other ways to control them like threatening to share images.

Sometimes, a person may not realise they are being abused, because the abuser has worked to form a friendship.

It can happen to anyone – but remember, it's not your fault.

**To find out
where to
get help,
scan the
QR code.**



Sexting

'Sexting' means sharing sexual messages, photos or videos. You have no control over how and where images might be shared online, so sexting can lead to bullying, humiliation or even blackmail.

Don't be pressured into sexting. If someone sends you a sexual text or pic, you don't have to send one back.

It's illegal to take or share sexual images of under-18s. If you've sent a nude and you're worried, ask for it to be deleted – don't reply to threats or send more images. Talk to someone you trust.

If you're under 18, you can get it removed from the internet – visit www.childline.org.uk and search for 'sexting'. You can also get help from the police at www.ceop.police.uk or call Childline on 0800 1111.



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YOUNG CARERS

Most young people help at home, but carers do a lot more. Their family rely on them to do things that they can't do, because of illness, disability or other problems.

Young carers often do things like cooking, housework and shopping, helping someone get out of bed or get dressed. They may provide emotional support, manage the family budget or look after brothers and sisters.

Balancing education and caring can be stressful and affect health, friendships and future opportunities. It can also be lonely – many young carers say no one in school knows what they do.

Many young carers develop great skills and qualities, and can be compassionate, resourceful, mature and good at coping with difficult situations. But everyone needs a break, and the chance to enjoy things like other young people.

Carers often take on greater responsibility as they get older, particularly if the person they care for becomes more ill or disabled. Young adult carers can find it difficult to pursue education, employment or training.



As a carer, you have a right to help and support. Use the QR code to find out more.

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BECOMING INDEPENDENT

From cooking and managing money to living independently and keeping healthy, being an adult brings a whole new set of responsibilities.

If you receive health or social care services, you may transfer to adult services, or take over your own care. You should be involved in any decisions about this.

You'll also need to think about whether you want to go to college, university, training or get a job.

From jobs and careers to managing your money, there are services to help.

Scan to learn more →



WHAT'S THE HARM?

Smoking

Smoking seriously harms your health – even in small amounts. Smoking can give you:

- Wrinkles, grey skin, stained hands and teeth
- High risk of cancer
- Increased risk of heart disease and lung conditions
- More stress

**For top tips on
how to quit,
scan here**



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Vaping (e-cigarettes)

It's illegal to buy tobacco or vaping products if you're under 18. Anyone buying them for you is breaking the law.

Vaping's effects on the body are still unclear. Although e-cigarettes may help to quit smoking tobacco, they are still a risk because they contain highly addictive nicotine.



For top tips on
how to quit,
scan here



Don't leave them charging for long periods or if you're not around – they can cause a fire.



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Drugs and alcohol

No drug use is completely safe. If you buy illegal drugs, you can't be sure what's in them, so there's a higher risk of poisoning or overdose, leading to brain damage or even death. Even if friends claim they had a good time with a drug, there's no guarantee that your body will react the same. Many drugs cause brain injuries after only a small amount.

Alcohol and some illegal drugs like marijuana are more common, but they still carry long-term health risks and can affect your education and relationships. If you're under 18, alcohol and drugs can affect your brain development and overall health.

These tips can help you keep safe:

- ➔ Eat before you go out
- ➔ Dress for the weather – alcohol increases hypothermia risk
- ➔ Plan how you'll get home – keep money for fares
- ➔ Never leave drinks unattended – in case they get spiked
- ➔ Stay with friends – being in a group is safer
- ➔ If you drink alcohol, learn to pace yourself, and consider lower-alcohol drinks or alcohol-free beers. Don't try and keep up with your friends – they may have different levels



- Don't mix drugs and alcohol
- Stay hydrated – but not too much. Ecstasy (MDMA) can cause the body to stop making urine. If you drink water too quickly it can affect your salt balance, which is dangerous
- Don't give in to peer pressure. Others may be drinking too much or taking drugs, but you can make your own choices
- It's best to know what to do if someone has a bad reaction to drugs or alcohol. The main signs of overdose are loud snoring or breathing problems, pale skin, blue lips, being unconscious or sleepy



If someone may have overdosed, stay calm and find out what they have taken. Lie them on their side in the recovery position, with their airway clear so they don't choke on any vomit. Call 999 and tell them everything you know – it could save a life.



KEEPING SAFE

Out and about

Hanging out with friends is normal – but it's important to stay safe. Some would-be abusers hang around areas where young people spend time together. They may try to become friends using money, drugs or alcohol, or parties.

- **Don't automatically trust them –** even if they seem friendly
- **Listen to your instincts.** If it seems too good to be true, it probably is!
- **It's OK to say no** if you don't want to do something
- **Don't accept 'gifts'** like drugs, alcohol and cigarettes
- **Don't go off alone** if you've drunk alcohol or taken drugs
- **Don't give out your number** or add people on social media unless you know them properly
- **Keep your phone charged** and in credit
- **Memorise the number of a trusted adult**

If you have concerns or are worried about a friend, talk to a parent, teacher, school nurse or someone you trust.



Online safety

Stay alert if a stranger tries to contact you through social media, an online platform or game. Some people genuinely want to be friends, but others are pretending to be something they are not. Abusers may pretend to share your interests or try to make you feel special. Some may move conversations onto sex, or ask for naked pictures or videos. This is against the law.

Tips to stay safe online:

- ➔ **Don't give out personal information** – name, email, phone number, address or the name of your school – to people you don't know
- ➔ **Don't add people you don't know**, and only talk to people in gaming if you know them in real life. Don't arrange to meet in person
- ➔ **Turn settings to private**, so people you don't know can't see your posts or location. Anything you post could be saved or shared by people who see it
- ➔ **Block anyone who acts inappropriately**. Speak to your parents/carers or a trusted adult if you're worried
- ➔ **Think about what you're posting**. Would you want your gran to see it?

Scan to learn more ➔





- **Choose strong passwords** that can't be guessed, and don't use the same one for every account
- **Beware of dangerous internet challenges.** Many young people have died from dangerous challenges which involve trying to faint on purpose. Don't be next
- **Check for a padlock symbol in the address bar** (which shows a site is secure) before entering information like payment or address details



Homeless?

We tend to think of homelessness as sleeping on the streets. But you can be classed as homeless if you sleep on a friend's sofa, in poor conditions, or somewhere unsuitable. If you don't have a legal right to stay anywhere, or you're at risk of harm, that means you are homeless.

Your local council can help. They will offer you support and help you plan your next steps.

This could be legal help, meeting a housing officer or finding a temporary home. If the council thinks you are vulnerable – for example, if you're under 18, have a disability or mental health problems – you may be given a social worker to help you.

For help, contact your council, visit www.barnardos.org.uk or www.shelter.org.uk, or call Centrepont on 0808 800 0661.



Gambling and gaming

Gambling is everywhere – on our streets, mobiles and TVs.

Gambling is when you risk money or something of value to predict the outcome of a game. If you get it right, you win money; if you're wrong, you lose your money. There are many different types – from scratch cards or fruit machines to betting with friends.

Online gaming stimulates the same parts of the brain as gambling. Gaming can put you under pressure to spend and cause harm in similar ways.

Spending money on in-game purchasing like loot boxes, spinning wheels or slot machines, level-ups or hints can quickly lead to you losing track of your spending.

In some games, players buy, sell, and exchange skins to customise their characters. Sometimes these are used for a form of betting.

Spending too much time is very common in games with an immersive world, or customisable characters. This can cause repetitive strain injury and sleep deprivation, or lead to not taking proper care of yourself.

Scan the QR code for services that can help.



County lines and drug dealing

'County lines' gangs use children and young people to move and sell illegal drugs.

They sometimes offer gifts like money in return for small favours like 'keeping watch'. They then move onto bigger, more dangerous things like keeping drugs or weapons.

A young person might feel like a respected member of the gang, when they are actually being controlled. Sometimes criminals do this by saying they owe money for things they thought were gifts. The criminals will then say they are in debt and have to work to pay off the money.

County lines gangs are very dangerous and may threaten and attack rival gangs to remove them from the area.

If you think someone is in immediate danger, call 999. You can also call Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 or visit [Fearless.org](https://www.fearless.org) anonymously.

How do I know if someone is being exploited?

If someone has injuries they don't want to talk about, has more money or expensive items or often goes missing, this may be a sign that they are being exploited. Other warning signs are suddenly having a new group of friends, more than one phone or getting anxious if they can't take calls.



Knife crime

It's against the law to carry a knife, acid or other weapon in a public place – whatever your reason.

Gangs might pressure someone into carrying a knife, or they may feel that it's expected of them. Some types of music make it sound glamorous.

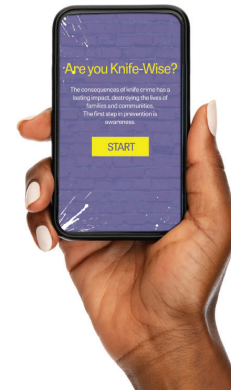
It's not. Whatever the reason for carrying a knife, it usually means the person is scared.

What if someone I know is carrying a knife?

Be ready to listen. Talk to them about the choices they have and how they can get help. If you carry a knife, you're more likely to be targeted, injured or even killed. You can dispose of a knife anonymously at a police station (be sure to wrap it securely).

Anyone who tries to pressure you to carry a knife is not a real friend. If you're worried, speak with a trusted adult, parent/carer or teacher, or one of the organisations below:

- **www.fearless.org:** A safe place to give information about crime – 100% anonymously
- **www.northumbria.police.uk**
- **Download the Knife-Wise app** – knowing the facts could save a life





North East and
North Cumbria

THE LITTLE BOOK OF USEFUL STUFF



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