



# My Own Mind

**healthwatch**  
Cambridgeshire

## Healthwatch Cambridgeshire

Our role is to make sure local people have a say when important decisions are made about their health and social care services.

We find out about people's experiences of care and share them with the organisations who make the decisions, to help them improve care where it is needed.

If care is not working in the way it should, then we have statutory powers to challenge health and care decision makers.

We are independent and local. Our Healthwatch is part of a national network through Healthwatch England, and we have direct links with regulatory bodies such as the Care Quality Commission and Monitor.

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# Executive summary

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We wanted to know about young people's attitudes to stress and anxiety. This was a subject that students at Ely College told us was important to them. We designed a survey with the health and social care students in the sixth form, and they helped to promote the questionnaire around the whole college, as well as organise two focus group sessions.

In the questionnaire we asked young people:

- If they ever felt stressed or anxious
- What sort of things made them feel stressed or anxious
- What they did to cope and feel better

We received 107 responses. This is what the majority of young people said:

- Young people at the College told us that the majority of them had felt stressed and anxious at least once, at some point in their lives.
- Young people told us that they felt most stressed by exams and things that occurred at school or outside the home.
- Almost half of young people told us they keep stressful and anxious feelings to themselves. Lots of young people do talk to friends and or family members about their feelings.
- Most students said they have enough help to cope with stress and anxiety.
- Most girls said that talking to someone would help them cope. Boys were more likely to prefer doing some kind of activity, like running or going to the gym.

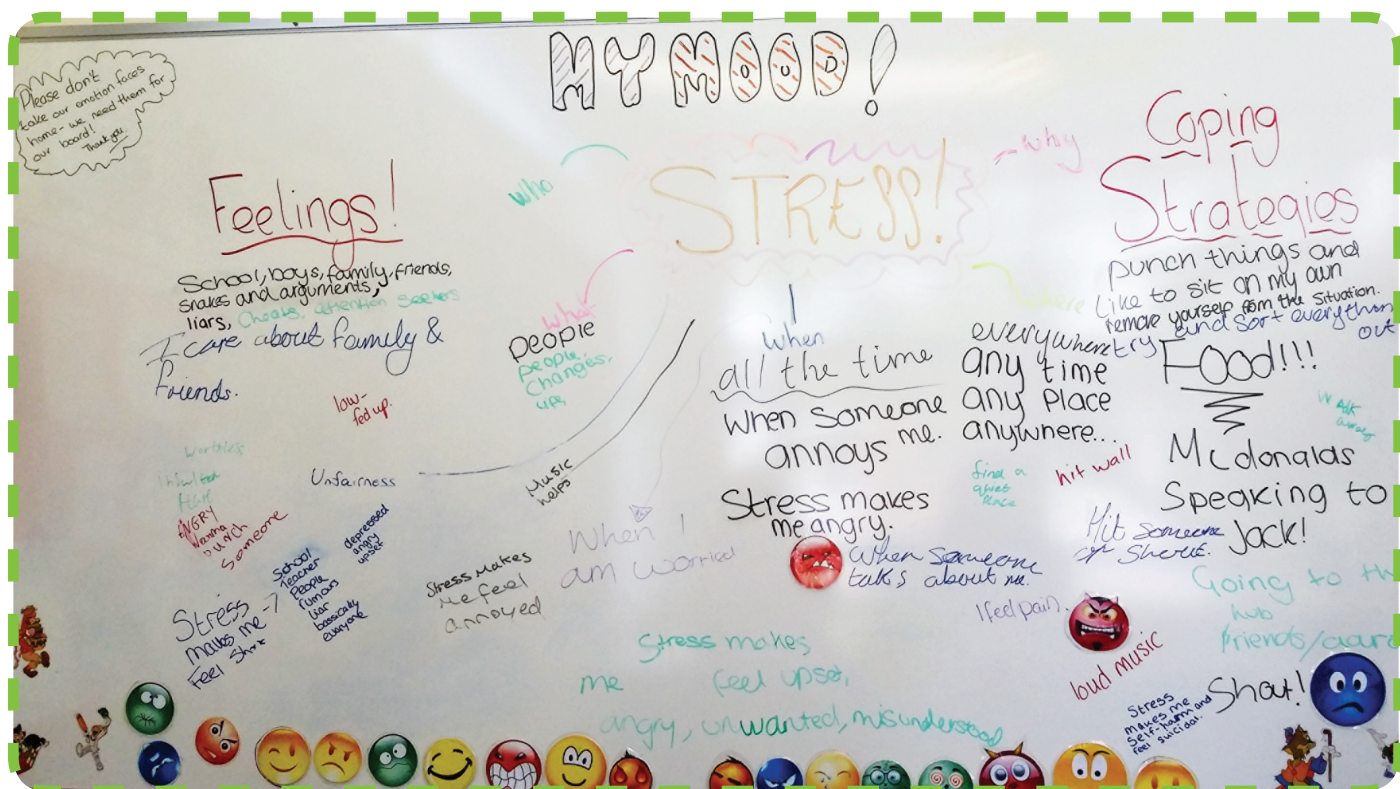
The young people who came to the focus group told us about some of the things that made them feel stressed. The issues young people told us about were similar to those we found in the survey. The top issues discussed were:

- College life and college work, particularly exams.
- Home life, including the dynamics around family, break ups and extended families.
- Negotiating friendships and relationships with other people.
- Health problems.

As a result of these findings we put together a list of what young people would like to see change. They said:

- Stigma should be tackled.
- It's important having someone to talk to.
- It would be helpful to have real life examples of how people deal with stress and anxiety.
- Young people should have a role to play when it comes to help each other.
- Having a quiet room to go to is important.
- More opportunities to talk confidentially and informally with teachers.
- Support must be provided in a familiar and comfortable setting.

One of the teachers created a mood board for young people to write and draw about their feelings and strategies for managing stress. The board was up in college for 2 weeks, and many young people used it to tell us about their experiences, both in words and emoticons.



# Introduction

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The wellbeing of young people is very important for us at Healthwatch Cambridgeshire. We work hard to find out what young people think about their mental health and wellbeing support, linking with local groups and organisations to help us do this. We were delighted to be able to develop the “My Own Mind” project with the students at Ely College, to find out about their experiences and opinions.

As a local Healthwatch, we help make sure the organisations that make decisions about young people’s mental health and wellbeing services, listen to these experiences. These include the commissioners who plan and pay for them, and the organisations who provide that support.

Earlier this year we were concerned about difficulties some young people and families were having getting help from the local Childrens and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Sometimes children and young people were waiting too long for help. We also heard concerns around the quality of some of the support given.

We told Healthwatch England about our concerns, as we thought it was part of a national problem. A number of local Healthwatch have also raised similar concerns about CAMH services in their areas.

We are pleased that the feedback we passed on was listened to by the national task force set up to improve CAMHS. The task force published its Future in Mind report earlier this year, including a number of recommendations, which are now being implemented across England.

Our local health commissioners are working with the main NHS provider to re-think how local mental health services are provided to young people and their families. CAMH care is only a small part of the picture. The majority of health and wellbeing support is provided by a number of voluntary and community organisations.

We know that keeping emotionally well and getting help early on, can stop people’s mental health getting worse. This report tells many stories about young people’s experiences and the sorts of things that can help them stay healthy and well.

We at Healthwatch Cambridgeshire will be using this report to raise the issues with schools, the County Council, the Clinical Commissioning Group and other organisations that have a role to play.

## How and why we did it

We wanted to find out about young people's attitudes to stress and anxiety in Ely College. This was a subject that students in the sixth form told us was important to them.

We planned the project with the sixth form health and social care class, who helped us design a short questionnaire. In the questionnaire we asked young people to tell us:

- If they ever felt stressed or anxious
- What sort of things made them feel stressed or anxious
- What they did to cope and feel better

The project took place during two days in June 2015 and was promoted throughout the school with help from the students. 107 students completed the survey.

We then set up two focus group sessions; one for young people aged 13 to 15 years, and another for young people aged 16 to 18 years. Each group included students from the College, a Healthwatch representative and a college representative. Here we talked openly with young people about issues of stress and anxiety.

This final report is to help professionals who make decisions about young people's mental health support, to understand young people's own experiences. We want the professionals to know what is most important to the young people we spoke to.

We will also share the report findings with schools around the county in order to build relationships and improve outcomes for young people.

**Let's hear from young people**



## Question 1:

### Do you ever feel stressed, anxious or on edge?

Young people at the College told us that the majority of them had felt stressed and anxious at least once, at some point in their lives. Most students said they only felt stressed and anxious now and again, with some not at all; however, some students said most days and all the time.



35%, 1 in 3 young people suffer from stress and anxiety

## Question 2:

### What would you say makes you stressed and/or anxious?

Young people told us that they felt most stressed by exams and things that occurred at school or outside the home. Young people were also worrying about their health, their weight and relationships with friends. Young people could tick more than one option for this question.



52% Exams



48% Stress at school or outside home



36% Their weight or how they look



25% Friends



21% Health

### Question 3:

## What do you do when you're feeling stressed and anxious?

Almost half of young people told us they keep stressful and anxious feelings to themselves. Lots of young people talk to friends and or family members about their feelings. Other Students also told us they sought little or no help from teachers, school nurses or their GP. Students could tick more than one option for this question.



### Question 4:

## Do you feel you have enough help to cope with stress and anxiety?

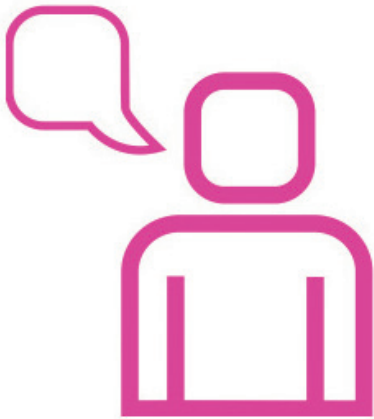
Most students said they have enough help to cope with stress and anxiety.



## Question 5:

# What kind of things would help you cope better with stress and anxiety?

We received a number of different answers to this question, showing big differences between the coping strategies of girls and boys. Most girls said that talking to someone would help them cope. Boys were more likely to prefer doing some kind of activity, like running or going to the gym.



Having someone to talk to

Someone to easily approach in school

Talking to people who understand

Someone to give me advice

Doodling, drawing, sketching, distracting the mind

Sports help

More things to release energy on

More video games to play



# Focus Group Sessions

# Focus group sessions



We ran two focus groups to listen to young people's experiences in more detail. The first focus group was for 13-15 years; four young people came to this group. The second group was for 16-18 year olds, seven young people came to this group. We used the survey questions to help us find out a bit more about young people's experiences.

The young people who came to the focus group told us about some of the things that made them feel stressed. The issues young people told us about were similar to those we found in the survey. The top issues discussed were:

- College life and college work, particularly exams.
- Home life including the dynamics around family break ups and extended families.
- Negotiating friendships and relationships with other people.
- Health problems.

## We talked about what stress is and how it makes them feel

The young people talked about their emotions and how stress and anxiety made them feel and behave. Some of the students said they could recognise when they or someone close to them was stressed.

*'I've got the weight of the world on my shoulders'*

*'Crying'*

*'Emotional'*

*'Stress clouds your logic, talking can help re-find that logic'*

*'I get shy and walk away'*

*'Angry'*

*'Sleeping at random times'*

*'Fidgety and snappy'*

*'I became very withdrawn and lost all my confidence'*

*'It's more than you can cope with'*

## Managing stress and anxiety

Young people told us about different activities they did, to help them cope with stress and anxiety.

Activities like listening to music and dancing were popular. One student said that drama brought them a *'...temporary release...you become someone else'*.

Art and colouring in books were useful for some students, one said *'it clears my mind a bit'*.

Some students found it helpful to write things down but this did not help everyone, and one student said that writing it down *'increased my agitation'*.

Some liked to go out with their friends. Some liked to eat food as a way of distracting themselves from how they were feeling.

Taking part in sports or being active outside of school and the home was a popular way of managing stress and anxiety. Students mentioned activities like cycling, martial arts and Majorettes.

Some young people said taking their mind off bad things is better than talking about it:

- 'Nothing really gets rid of the stress, at best it just gets pushed to the back of your mind, it comes back afterwards'*
- 'They don't have time'*
- 'People don't understand me, so there's no point talking'*

Many of the students recognised the value of talking to someone but not everyone felt able to do this. When we asked if students had enough support in school, this is what they told us:

- 'I like to be independent...I don't want to feel I have to trust people', 'I don't want to put that much trust in people. It's my problem'*
- 'I wouldn't talk to teachers about anything'*
- 'there are so many students, they probably have other things to worry about'*
- 'it's awkward'*
- 'I don't get on with people'*
- 'I wouldn't talk to my parents'*

# Focus group sessions

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Young people seemed to agree that if something ‘big’ happened, then they would talk to some of the staff. They also commented about The Hub, (a room provided by the school that can be used by students whenever they can’t cope). We had mixed responses as to whether this was a useful resource. Some wanted somewhere quiet and with no people, others somewhere with background noise to help them take their mind off things.

Young people also told us about supporting each other and seemed to be uncertain about what’s helpful, but between good friends there was a degree of empathy - *‘if she has a go at me, then I just take it’*.

When talking about stigma they showed concerns about showing weakness, this was particularly an issue for boys.

We didn’t have a lot of responses about going online, using other resources or organisations, but a number of students had used Brookside Child and Family Consultation Clinic and had poor experiences.

Some students in the older group felt that finding the right support was difficult, and that leaflets weren’t always much help. They raised some concerns:

- They said that they needed confidence to seek out support, and that most young people didn’t have the confidence, especially when feeling stressed.
- There is a lot of stigma and people can feel ashamed to ask for help, especially boys - *‘feeling that it’s a weak thing to do...but we are human [stress] is human’*.
- Many of them said their GPs are very busy and don’t have time to spend with them, they had concerns about other patients having ‘more serious problems’.
- Young people worried that if they spoke to a teacher, their problems were shared more widely amongst other staff members. They wanted a greater degree of confidentiality.
- There were concerns that sharing problems with close family and friends may be seen as a burden to them. Young people worried that they would be adding to other people’s stresses; however, they mostly recognised that it can help to talk.
- They needed to feel that there was a good relationship with the person they were turning to, and if there wasn’t, then there needed to be an alternative to talk to. To go outside the NHS was an expense their families couldn’t afford.

Some young people also told us about their experiences with Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). They told us that:

## CAMHS experience

A young person reported poor experience of using CAMHS after an emergency acute admission:

- Didn't feel that they could talk to the person allocated.
- Made them feel their issues weren't important.
- There had been one unsatisfactory post discharge appointment and no follow up.
- They didn't feel able to re-access the service.

Another student we talked to reported a more positive experience. They seemed to have learnt some personal coping mechanisms, particularly the value of how good it was to have someone to *'express yourself to'*.

Three young people reported on their experience with Brookside:

- Long waits
- Not helpful
- *'Hard to get the support you need'*
- *'It was unpleasant. I didn't like it...they didn't do much, there's been nothing since'*
- *'They don't really help you in the way you want... it doesn't help, them just sitting being silent'*

One young person also told us about their private counselling experience:

- Felt it had been helpful, *'friendlier'*
- No wait



**What young people felt  
needed to change**

# What young people felt needed to change: Summary of responses

1

Stigma should be tackled.  
Understand how young people  
themselves feel about stress  
and how to deal with it

*‘Understand that stress is a necessary thing in life and you shouldn’t feel bad about it...instead, recognise “I’m stressed. How am I going to deal with it?”’*

2

The importance of  
talking to someone

*‘talking or sharing is seen as a sign of weakness, I don’t want to seem strange because I need...help, to help me cope’.*

3

Real life examples of  
how people deal with stress  
and anxiety

There needs to be better resources and education about the topic so students feel informed about what is happening and their options.

4

**There is a role for young people  
in helping each other**

Especially around encouraging one another to talk about their stress and anxiety issues, and encouraging them to find support that works.

5

**Having a quiet room in college  
for students to go if they  
need help**

Young people felt that ‘the room’ should be available for students when they most need it, and not just for students who want to relax.

6

**More opportunities to talk  
confidentially and informally  
with teachers**

In a way that fits more naturally into the flow of the school day.

7

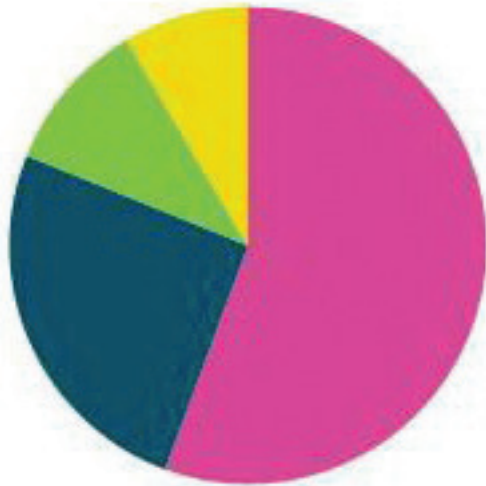
**Support must be provided in  
familiar and  
comfortable settings**

# Appendix



## Question 1 chart

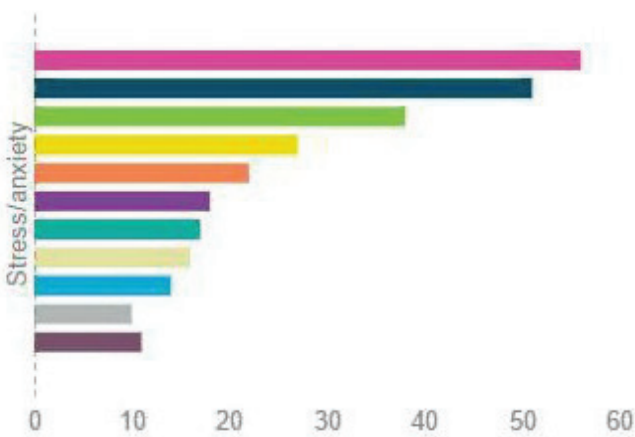
Do you ever feel stressed, anxious or on edge?



- Now and again (56%)
- Most days (25%)
- All the time (10%)
- Never (8%)

## Question 2 chart

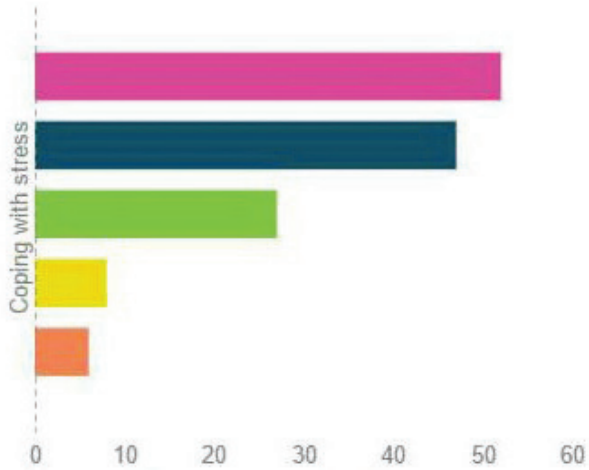
What would you say makes you stressed and/or anxious?



- Exams
- Stress at School/outside home
- My weight and how I look
- Friends
- My health
- No one to turn to
- Recent events
- Bullying
- Financial problems
- Caring for family
- Social media

### Question 3 chart

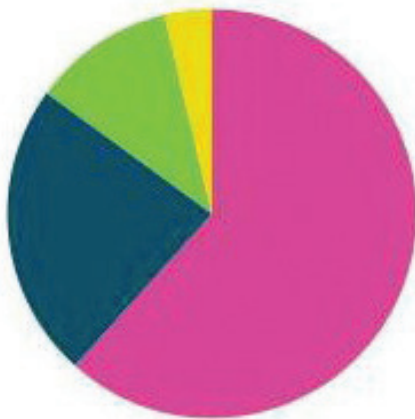
What do you do when you're feeling stressed and anxious?



- Keep it to myself
- Speak to a friend
- Speak to a family member
- Don't know
- Play video games

### Question 4 chart

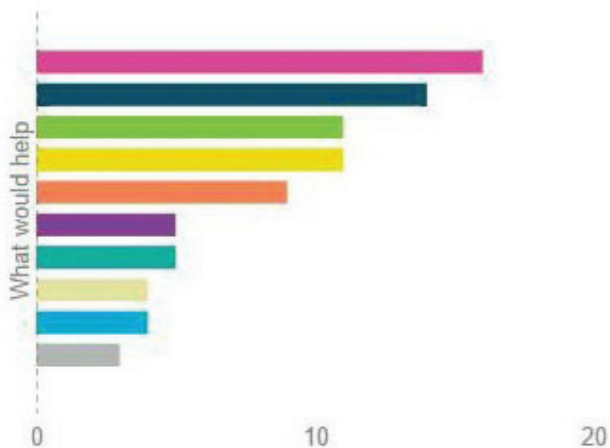
Do you feel you have enough help to cope with stress and anxiety?



- Yes (63%)
- No (23%)
- Sometimes (11%)
- Don't know (4%)

### Question 5 chart

What kind of things would help you cope better with stress and anxiety?



- Talking to someone
- Relaxing/reading/music
- Food
- Doing sports
- Being alone
- Self harming/Crying
- Better information
- Video games
- Less homework
- Don't know

## Acknowledgements and Thanks

We want to thank Ely College, in particular the 6th form Health and Social Care class who helped develop the survey and focus group sessions. These students worked hard to get as many people as possible to complete the survey.

We also want to say a special thanks to Lynn Riches, the teacher without whom this project and report wouldn't be possible.

Finally we want to thank young people who spoke to us and shared their opinions and experiences. This report was written for you.



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