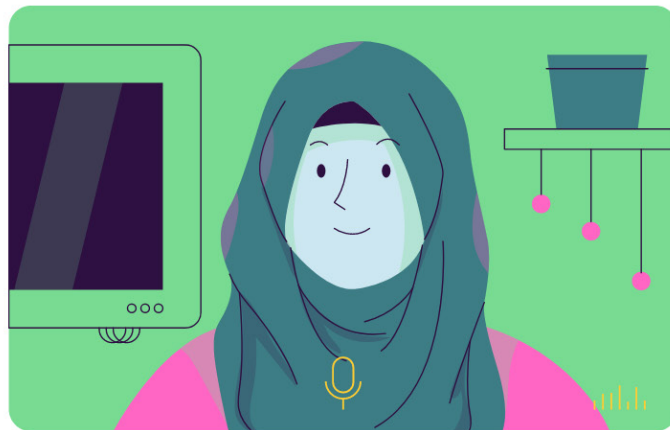
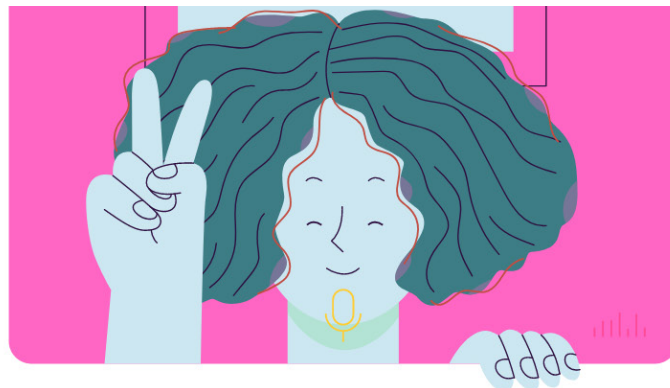


# ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH

## GUIDE 1: MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING



## INTRODUCTION

Youth reporters identified mental health as one of the top three topics that they wanted to learn more and raise awareness about. Mental health and wellness is so important! It connects to so many different parts of our lives, to how we think and feel about ourselves, about our relationships and how we cope with the ups and downs of everyday life. The thoughts and feelings we have about ourselves and others are not constant. They change depending on what is happening in our lives.

## DEFINITIONS

**Mental health** refers to a state of wellbeing that a person feels when they have a sense of their own abilities, when they can cope with the regular stresses of life, when they can cope at work or at school, when they can build and maintain healthy relationships and when they can participate in and contribute to life in their community.

**Wellbeing** is a consistent state of wellness, satisfaction and contentment (WHO 2018).

Mental illnesses refer to a wide range of mental health conditions, including disorders, that can affect your mood, thinking and behaviour. Examples of mental illnesses are depression, schizophrenia, anxiety disorders, eating disorders and addictive behaviours. Mental illnesses can affect anyone, regardless of gender, age, race or class.

**A diagnosis** is when a medical doctor assesses and confirms whether someone has a mental health condition or not, based on the presence of signs and symptoms. A diagnosis is the confirmation that someone has a mental health condition.

**Trauma** refers to experiences or situations that are emotionally painful and distressing, and that overwhelm someone's ability to cope, leaving them feeling powerless. Traumatic events can be once off or involve a series of distressing experiences over time. People often assume that only extreme once-off events in someone's life can be seen as traumatic (Adapted from [HealthinfoNet](#)). Many young South Africans experience trauma as part of their everyday lives, because of racism, violence and poverty.

**Stress** is the body's way of responding to a threat / difficulty or to situations where there is a perceived threat. Although the body's stress response system helps us to cope with these moments, high levels of stress, over a long period of time, is not healthy ([Beyond Blue](#)).

Some say resilience is an individual's ability to bounce back from a difficult situation. Research is showing that resilience depends on more than just the individual's personal capacity. It also depends on the conditions around the individual, like the resources and supportive relationships that they have

## DEFINITIONS

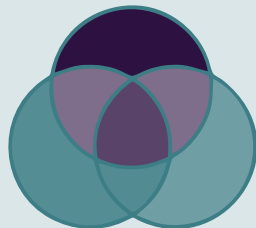
access to. Research shows that in order for young people to thrive, the environment they find themselves in and their networks of support, are as important as their personal characteristics (Boing Boing).



DID YOU KNOW?

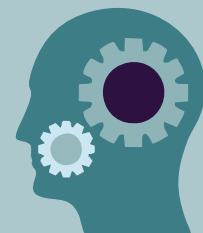
**1 in 10 South Africans**

have access to mental health treatment and care (SADAG). 1 in 3 South Africans have a mental health issue at some point in their lives.



(SADAG)

**1 in 6 South Africans suffer from anxiety, depression or substance-use problems.**



(SADAG)

The Western Cape has the highest prevalence of mental illness in South Africa, with almost 40% of people living with different mental health conditions: 19% with anxiety disorders, 14% with mood disorders and 21% with substance use disorders.

(Burden of Disease Report 2019)

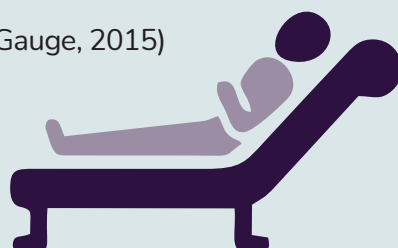


A 2016 study of mental health in adolescents in South Africa shows that a high number of young people are living with common mental disorders including **depression (41%), anxiety (16%) and post-traumatic stress disorder (21%)**. For adolescents who self-identify as Black/Coloured and/or with material disadvantage, the rates of common mental disorders are even higher.

(SHaW Study)

In South Africa, 37.2% of young people who reported feelings of sadness had sought treatment from a counsellor or doctor.

(South African Child Gauge, 2015)



In the USA, 1 in 4 young people (24.7%) reported feeling sad or hopeless, and just under 18% had made at least one suicide attempt (The Youth Risk Behaviour Survey).

(CDC)



## MYTH BUSTERS

### MYTH

People with a mental illness can just pull themselves out of it. If they try hard enough, they can make their symptoms go away.

### FACT

Mental illnesses cannot be 'cured' by personal strength, determination or motivation alone. Mental illnesses require care and treatment, along with personal actions that support individuals to get well. Saying that people can get better only by using their will can be hurtful to the person who is struggling. It can also get in the way of them trying to get help. Seeking help is a sign of resilience and strength, not a weakness.

Mental illness is incurable and lifelong.

With the right kind of help, such as early and appropriate treatment, most people can recover fully and have no further episodes of an illness. For other people, episodes may recur throughout their lives, but these episodes can be managed through ongoing treatment.

Having a mental illness means you are "crazy."

Having a mental illness does not mean you are "crazy." Mental illnesses can affect your thinking, impact your mood or mess with your perception of reality, but it doesn't mean you are crazy. Saying someone is crazy shows a lack of information about mental health and different mental illnesses.



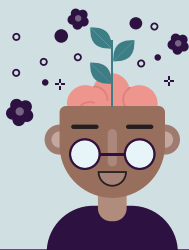
## UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

There are many different ways of understanding and taking care of our mental health and wellbeing. Some people might go to a doctor to treat their symptoms with medication or therapy. Others might go to a sangoma to get traditional medicine or guidance on ancestral rituals that they need to perform to return to a state of wellness. Some people may seek healing through prayer or going to church. Even though we may have different approaches to understanding and taking care of our mental health and wellbeing, **we all know in ourselves what it means to feel well.**

Being mentally well does not mean that we never have negative thoughts or difficult feelings. We all face challenges that make us

feel angry, sad, overwhelmed and everything in-between. Being mentally well is about being able to feel and express a range of different emotions; to understand where they are coming from, and to deal with the challenges we are facing. This is why taking care of our mental health is important for everyone, and not only for people who are living with diagnosed mental health conditions.

It is important to understand that mental health and wellbeing exists on a continuum, which means it changes. We can move up and down on the continuum, depending on how we are feeling, and also, depending on what we are going through at any given time (Adapted from BeyondBlue).



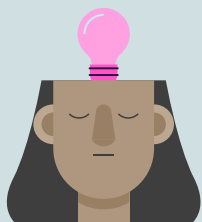
**THRIVING**

When we are in the **thriving zone**, we are functioning at an optimal level, we relate well to others, we are curious to learn new things and we feel generally optimistic about life. In this zone, we are not completely free from stress, but whatever challenges we face, we can cope with fairly well. We are able to sleep and eat well = **THRIVING**.



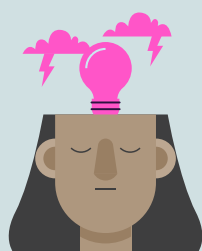
**SURVIVING**

When we are in the surviving zone, we feel worried, nervous, irritable and sad a lot of the time. We have trouble sleeping and avoid people at times when we are not feeling good. We are not in a severe state of distress, but these difficult feelings can be pointing to something that could get worse, so it is wise to reach out and ask for support = **SURVIVING**.



## STRUGGLING

When we are in the struggling zone, we feel very anxious. Our mood is low, and we find it hard to do anything well. Our concentration is poor, our energy is low, and we struggle to cope at school. We may feel emotional and physical pain, or we may feel numb and empty. Our thoughts are negative, we may struggle to sleep sometimes and we may feel a loss of appetite. How we are feeling could be a normal emotional response to a stressful situation, or it could also be the early sign of an emerging mental health condition = **STRUGGLING**.



## IN CRISIS

When we are in the crisis zone, we are in an extreme state of distress, and we need immediate help. Our emotional state might be so unbearable that we have thoughts about taking our own life. We experience severe anxiety or depression, or even both at the same time. We struggle with basic tasks such as personal hygiene, eating and sleeping. We might struggle to get out of bed and avoid all social contact = **IN CRISIS**.

**Exercise:** Think about how you feel in this moment - which zone would you say you are in? Now think about how you felt when you woke up this morning. Or last night. Or a week ago. At different times you will find yourself in different zones. And even within one zone, your feelings will vary. In the morning you might feel like you are in the struggling zone, and in the afternoon in the thriving zone. One way to take care of our mental wellbeing is to become more aware of our emotions and to seek help when we are not coping well (Adapted from Delphis).

## THINGS IN OUR LIVES THAT AFFECT OUR MENTAL HEALTH

As young people we are naturally creative, curious and resourceful. In order to thrive, we need to feel safe, to feel a sense of belonging and to feel like we have people to turn to when we are struggling. We want to reach our goals and feel proud of ourselves, but sometimes the situations we find ourselves in affect our ability to be well in this way. As young Black and Coloured South Africans, many of us grow up in communities that are struggling due to poverty. Our communities are impacted by the on-going legacy of Apartheid, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, racism, social injustice, inadequate housing and education, extreme pressures in our homes and overcrowding in our schools. These stresses can negatively impact our mental health.

Discrimination of any kind can also negatively impact our mental health. We can be discriminated against based on

our gender - with different experiences as girls, boys or gender non-conforming youth. As young people living with mental health conditions or different physical abilities, we may also experience discrimination.

As young people living with mental health conditions, we are more likely to face stigma in our families and communities, which is often why we feel ashamed or scared to talk about our condition or illness.

Due to lack of information, resources and services, many young people live with mental conditions that are undiagnosed. They often do not get the care and support that they need to be well and reach their goals in life.

## HEALTHY WAYS TO RESPOND TO MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

Remember, having good mental health doesn't mean that we are always in a good mood or that our lives are stress free. It means that we have the personal tools and networks of support to help us cope with whatever we are facing. COVID-19, challenges at home, or violence in our community, might feel like issues that are beyond our control, but taking care of our mental health - how

we respond to these situations - is still in our hands. Even when our personal circumstances are extremely challenging, there are some things we can do for ourselves: we can try to get a good night's sleep, exercise, eat as well as we can, and make an effort to build strong connections with friends and family, so that we have people to turn to when we are struggling. We can also ask for help



to manage strong emotions that make us feel overwhelmed. These are some of the things we can do to support our mental wellbeing.

If our sense of mental wellbeing is low for a long time, it can lead to mental health concerns including diagnosable mental health conditions like depression and anxiety. Although we might say we feel anxious and depressed sometimes, these feelings are normal responses to difficult situations. Feeling anxious or depressed all the time might mean we need to seek help in order to feel better.

How do you respond when you feel stressed? Do you reach out for support or do you withdraw?

As young people, it is important for us to connect with other young people (whether through church groups, dance groups or sports clubs) and to find spaces where we can express our opinions, develop our talents, build our skills and access services and opportunities that can help us to feel good about ourselves and our future.

## YOUTH VOICES (FROM THE FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS)

### What do you do to feel good?

- “Speaking to my friends, going to the park, listening to music, going outside, thinking about things that make me happy, going to church and to the library.”
- “Listening to music, singing and eating nice food.”
- “Go to the park with friends, to play on the merry go round, the swings and the slide and all that.”

### What happens when you are not feeling good?

- “When young people feel bad, sometimes they eat a lot. Some people go to church for prayer when they feel bad. Some go for therapy when they feel bad. Others turn to gang violence to feel included.”

- “When youth feel bad, they do drugs and they stay at home watching TV. They don’t answer their phones, they isolate themselves then end up committing suicide.”

### What can you do when you are not feeling good, to feel better?

- “You can journal to write stuff down.”
- “You can sleep if you’re feeling bad or listen to sad music. If you feel like there’s a certain artist whose music you relate to, you can listen to that artist or you can cry and just let it all out..
- “Some people go to their friends and tell them when they’re not feeling good. It helps them somehow. Some people go to the gym and just release all that stress that way.”

## TOOLS AND RESOURCES

### PLACES TO GO FOR SUPPORT

- **The Trauma Centre** - Cape Town-based based organisation offering trauma support.
- **Cape Mental Health** - Cape Town based organisation offering mental health counselling and support.
- **The Counselling HUB** - Low-cost counselling centre based in Cape Town.
- **Khululeka** - Cape Town-based organisation offering bereavement support programmes for children and adolescents.
- **South African Depression and Anxiety Group** - SADAG is Africa's largest mental health support and advocacy group.

### ONLINE RESOURCES

- **I Gotta Feeling** - Tips for Feeling Good
- **Be You** - Wellbeing fact sheet
- **Teen Mental Health.ORG** - What is mental health?
- **LilSass** - Children's book about emotional wellness
- **Planet Dovic19** - Sci-Fi Graphic Novel about young people's experiences of the pandemic.



# ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH

## RADIO PRODUCTION GUIDE

### ANGLES

Different ways to talk about adolescent mental health and wellbeing:

- What challenges are young people facing in your community?
- How does stress impact young people's mental health?
- What support is available for young people when they are feeling stressed?
- What can we as young people do to stay mentally well and support each other?
- What is the difference between mental health and wellbeing and mental health conditions or mental illnesses?

### CHOOSE AN ANGLE

Different ways to talk about what we as young people can do to stay mentally well:

- These are some of the things we can do to support our mental wellbeing.
- Practical things we can do: get a good night's sleep, exercise, eat as well as we can.
- Strengthen relationships: make an effort to build strong connections with friends and family, so that we have people to turn to when we are struggling.
- Seek help: ask for help to manage strong emotions that make us feel overwhelmed.
- Although we might say we feel anxious and depressed sometimes, these feelings are normal responses to difficult situations. Feeling anxious or depressed all the time might mean we need to seek help in order to feel better.

## FORMATS



### Vox pops



#### Vox pop aim

To get many opinions on one topic.



#### Who do you talk to?

Young people from the community, young people from the focus groups and young people who are active in different youth projects.



#### Question

What can we as young people do to stay mentally well?

---



### Audio commentary



#### Audio commentary aim

To get people's opinion about a topic that they care deeply about, in this case, ask young people who are actively looking after their mental wellbeing, or a counsellor who has seen the benefits of doing so in young people, to express themselves on the topic.



#### Who do you talk to?

A counsellor or social worker or youth mentor.



#### Questions for your interview with a mentor:

- What challenges do you see young people facing that have an impact on their mental health and well being?
- Do you think that boys and girls face different mental health challenges?
- Why do you think some people are ashamed to talk about their mental health challenges?
- What have you noticed about how we talk about mental health in our community?
- Does the way we talk about mental health help or prevent people from getting care and support?
- What advice would you give young people about the steps they can take to take care of their mental health and well being?



## Public Service Announcement (PSA)



### The aim of a PSA

To create a public awareness message. Create a PSA that encourages people to save water.



## Audio profile



### Audio profile aim

To get a first person account of someone's experience, passion or journey. Audio profiles often aim to inspire.



### Who do you talk to?

- A young person living with a mental health condition who wants to share their story.
- A young person who is proud of how they coped with a stressful situation.



### Questions

- What challenges did you face that impacted on your mental health?
- Do you think other young people face similar challenges?
- How did you know that you needed additional support with your mental health challenge?
- Where did you go for support?
- What advice would you give other young people who are not feeling mentally well?
- What ideas can you share with us that helped you to stay mentally healthy and well?
- What do you think young people need to know about mental health and wellness?

Please see interview questions in “How to present your show”



## SHARING TOOLS: SQUARE BREATHING TO CALM THE MIND

Even though we are breathing all the time, what we don't realise, is that we can use our breath to calm ourselves down. Today, we are going to share an exercise with you that you can try at home. This exercise is especially helpful when you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed. It is called SQUARE BREATHING. Let me explain how it works...

1. Firstly, you find somewhere comfortable to sit.
2. Then, you breathe in slowly through your nose while counting to four - let the air fill your belly like a balloon.
3. Then, you hold your breath in and count to four.
4. Then, you breathe out slowly through your mouth this time, and again, count to four.
5. And finally, stay with your breath exhaled and count to four....
6. And then start all over again.

For those of you who are listening, could we try out one round now so you can see how it feels? Who is with me?

Okay, so firstly, find a comfortable place to sit. Now that you are comfortable, you can get ready for the exercise. You can do this with your eyes open, or if you want to, you can also close your eyes, whatever feels comfortable. You can rest your hands on your lap or over your heart, whatever feels good for you.

Are you ready? Okay here goes, follow my instructions:

Breathe in 2, 3, 4... Hold 2, 3, 4... Breathe out 2, 3, 4... Hold 2, 3, 4.

Breathe in 2, 3, 4... Hold 2, 3, 4... Breathe out 2, 3, 4... Hold 2, 3, 4.

If your eyes were closed, take a moment to open your eyes and just check in with yourself, how are you feeling after those few rounds of breathing? We would love to hear from you how it felt to do this exercise! We hope it helped you to find a moment of calm. If it felt good, why not try to do it for a few minutes every day or whenever you feel stressed, to bring your body and mind into a more relaxed state.

## HOW TO PRESENT YOUR SHOW



Use your produced radio features, your research and the suggested script and questions to write your own script.

[INTRO:]

**Host 1:** It's just gone [TIME] and you're just in time for the [NAME OF SHOW] on [RADIO STATION]. My name is [NAME].

Host 2: That's right! And my name is [NAME], and today's show is about mental health and wellbeing. We all know how important our mental health is. Especially during times like a global pandemic, taking care of our mental health is more important than ever.

**Host 1:** As young people, there is a lot that is stressing us out. Sometimes we don't know what we can do to feel better, or where to turn to for support with the challenges we are facing. When we feel alone, we often turn to things that aren't really good for us and can create even more stress in the long run. There are a lot of things that make it hard to talk about our mental health, which is why this show is so important.

**Host 2:** Yes, it's so important to understand what affects our mental health and to know what we can do to cope better with what we are facing.

**Host 1:** So true. There is so much to talk about, so let's get started!

[PRESENT WHO IS BEING INTERVIEWED]  
[PLAY THE INTERVIEW]

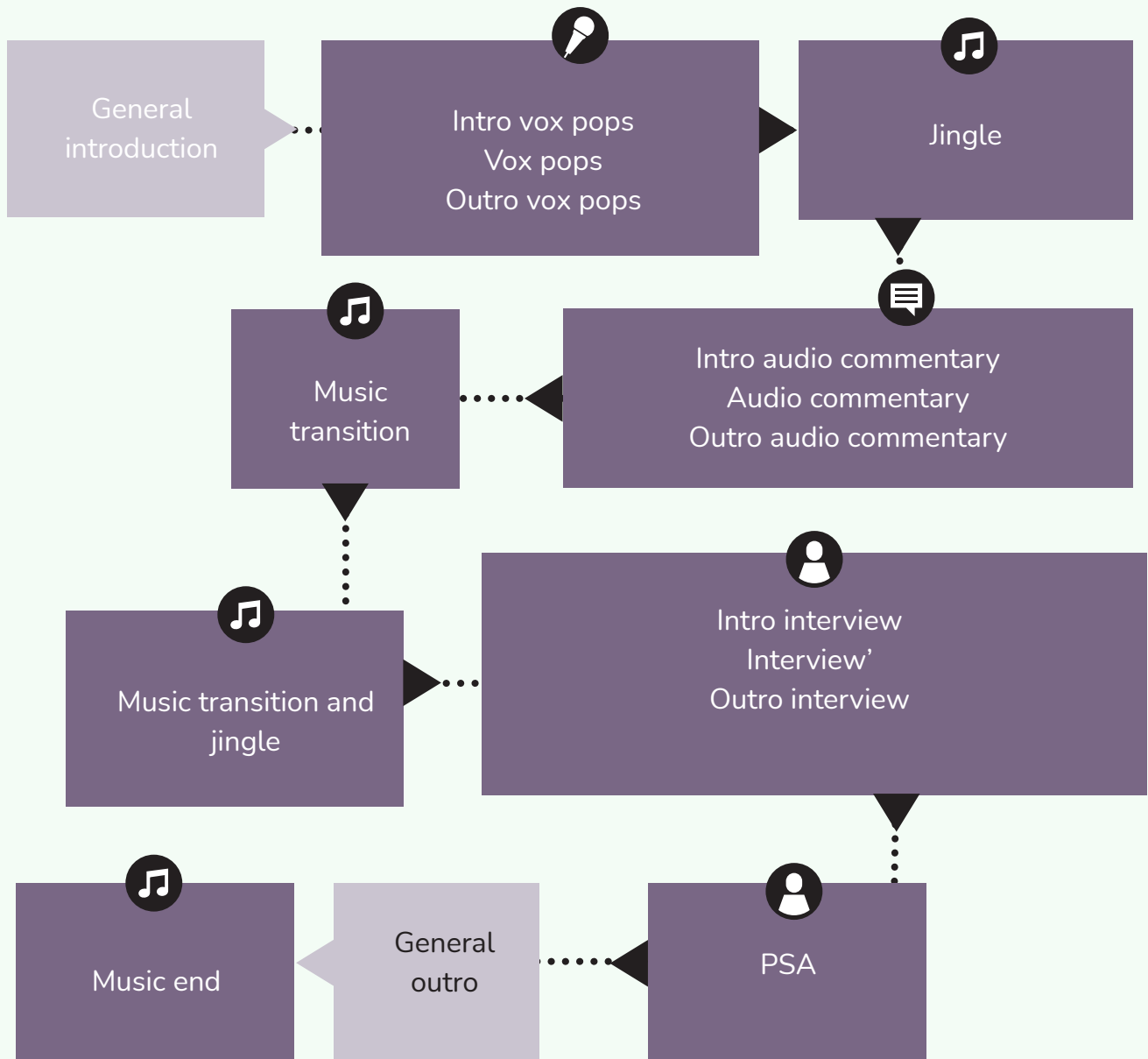
[OUTRO:]

**Host 1:** Today, we've learnt so much about what impacts our mental health as young people in Cape Town. We have also heard about some tools and ideas that we can use to stay mentally healthy and well.

**Host 2:** Yes, I have learnt so much from the show today. I hope that those who are listening have gotten some new ideas to support themselves and those around them.

**Host 1:** Next week on [DAY] at [TIME] we'll be talking more about mental health and young people. In the next show, we will be talking about the different changes that young people go through. Until then, it's bye from us!

## SHOW OUTLINE



### ETHICS AND CONSENT

This may be a sensitive topic for some, so make sure you inform your audience to respect those who share personal stories in the space.