

# The voice of youth

**Youthhealthtalk**  
Youthhealthtalk.org

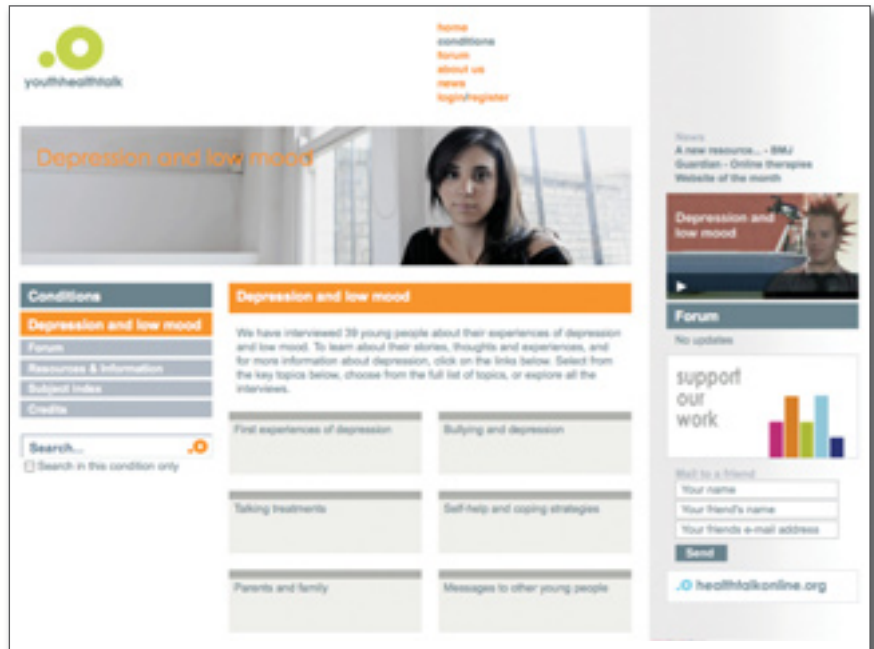
As a teenager, making sense of your mental health can be tricky; feelings of pointlessness, apathy and the overwhelming injustice of life are an adolescent standard. And talking about it is even harder. There's a good chance you'll be told to stop moping around and snap out of it.

It's just not fair. One in 10 young people in the UK experience depression, persistent low mood or anxiety: intense emotions, thoughts and physical symptoms that won't go away.

Youthhealthtalk is an award-winning charity website for young people in their teens to mid-twenties that covers issues like sexual health, teenage cancer, epilepsy and other long term health conditions. It focuses entirely on people's real experiences, barely gives advice beyond what is given by the young people themselves, and is agenda free.

A new section of the website gives young people a chance to watch, listen to and read other young people talking honestly and frankly about their own experiences of depression and low mood. Thirty-nine young people aged 16 to 27 talk about the early signs and symptoms, bullying and feeling different, coping strategies and treatments.

"I've always heard these voices," says Erika-Maye, 17, speaking on the



site. "I can't remember not hearing them, and for as long as I can remember I've always felt like I'm just draining people, and being a waste of people's time. And when they told me that the voices were depression-related, then I was saying I've heard them for as long as I can remember, so..."

## Using stories to cope

Commitment to letting people tell their own stories means the site can tackle difficult or controversial subjects, like being discovered self-harming by parents, why someone might be wary of contacting support aimed at young Muslims, or not being able to get any sensible advice:

"I'd look at things and it almost seemed like you were in some kind of video game," says university student Tom, 21, speaking on the site. "I was thinking, 'Well there's something wrong with my eyes or something...' I literally didn't know anything about depression. So I rang up like NHS Direct and they were like, 'Drink lots of fluids, you know, make sure you do this and

have you had a heart attack in the last five weeks, have you... whatever...?' And I was just like, 'This is useless. They haven't got a clue what's going on'."

Although the site is aimed at young people and their families and carers, its refusal to hide the difficulties some people face getting help or treatment has led to it being used for teaching and training in schools and the NHS.

Youthhealthtalk has a simple purpose: it is a place where you can find out how other people have coped with whatever you might be going through. It's a useful alternative to the prescriptive format favoured by most websites because, as Thom Yorke from Radiohead says in his video introduction, "Other people's stories are how we cope."

### Verdict: 9/10

A revealing and reassuring insight into other people's real experiences.

David Warrington

