

A Kid's Guide to Brain Injury



A Note to Parents.

This book has been designed to try and clear up some of the questions, concerns and fears that children may have about brain injury and how it has affected their loved one.

The combination of illustration and text has been designed so that older children can read along by themselves, while younger ones may be read to while following the images.

We include some advice at the end for children who may need someone to talk to. If you have concerns about your child and need to speak with a professional then we encourage you to contact the ISPCC or visit their website www.ispcc.ie

Further information about brain injury and Headway services can be found at www.headway.ie

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The Editorial Team.



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Headway
www.headway.ie
Brain Injury Information and Support Line
1890 200 278



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Tá faomhadh an Rialtais i gcomhair maoiniú as Ciste na gCuntas Díomhaoin ag an Tionscadal seo.

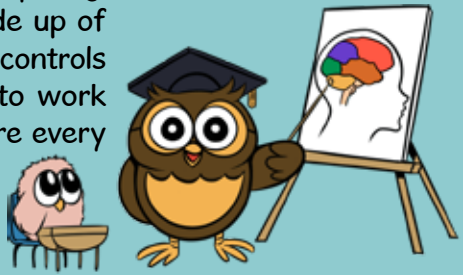


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Headway is accredited by CARF International
www.carf.org
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Your brain is the command centre of your body. It controls everything you do. How you think, how you feel, how you move, what you like to eat – everything! Your brain is also really complicated. It's made up of lots of different parts and each of those parts controls something different. Those parts all need to work together so that you can be the person you are every day.



Even though it is really well protected inside your head, your brain can get hurt and injured. This can happen in lots of ways, for example if you fall off a bike, or are in a car crash. Sometimes if you get really, really sick this can hurt your brain too.



If you fall off your bike and land on your arm, then you might get lucky and just have cuts and bruises but you might also be unlucky and break your arm. The same thing can happen after a brain injury, which is why different people have different problems. You can hurt your brain badly, like a broken arm, or you might only hurt it a little, like cuts and bruises.



When your brain gets hurt it can affect things like how you think, feel and move. This can be hard to understand because we can't see our brains, so we are going to take a look inside our heads and try to figure it all out.





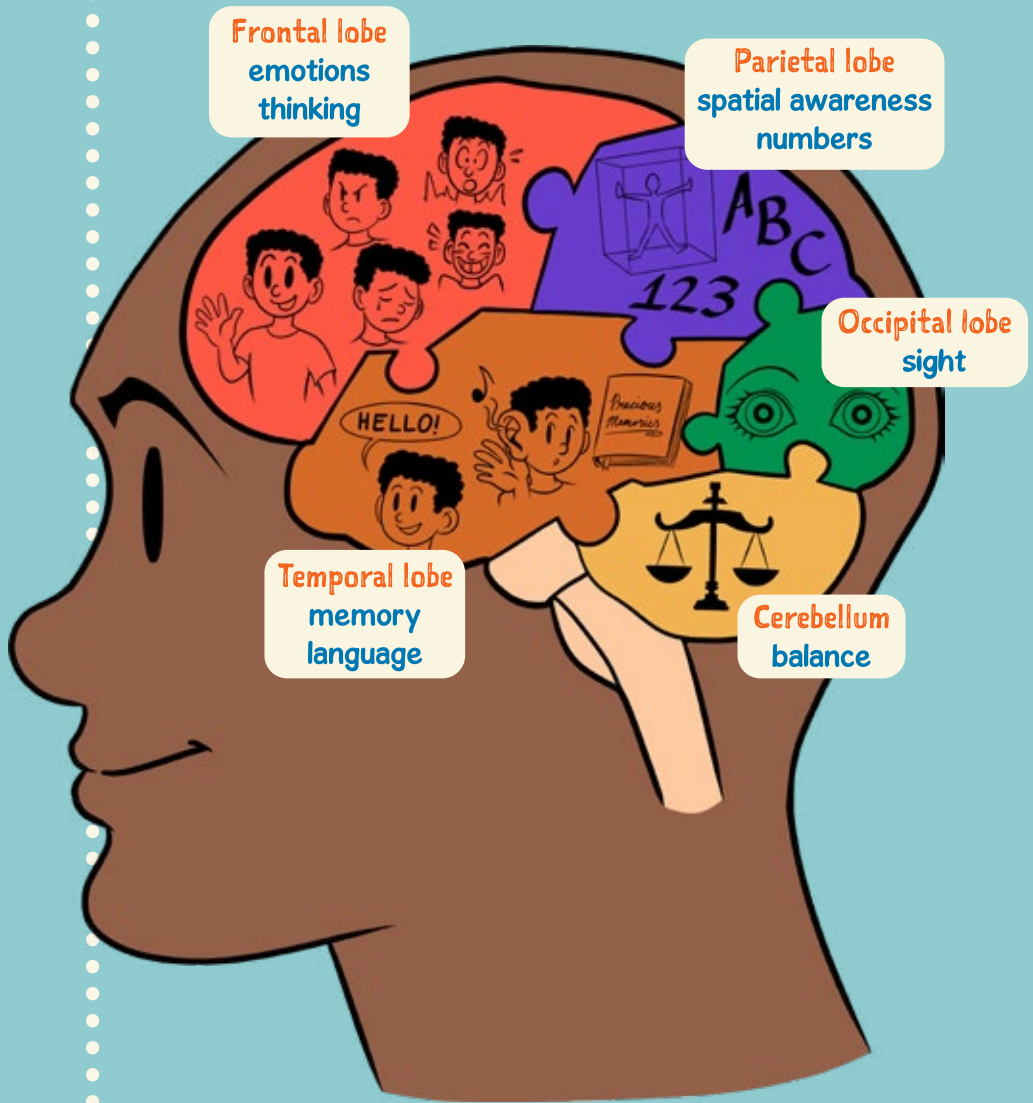
You might have heard people talking about the “left” brain and the “right” brain. This doesn’t mean that you have two brains inside your head, but you do have two sides of the same brain. Each of these sides, or hemispheres, has different jobs to do.

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The left part of your brain is great at things like doing maths, while the right part of your brain is more artistic.

The brain also has four main parts to it that we call lobes. Each of these lobes is important for different jobs, but just as players in different positions on a football pitch need to work together to score goals, the brain is only at its best when the lobes all work together.



After a brain injury some parts of the brain might not work as well as they used to, or they might stop working altogether. If this happens the person with the brain injury could seem very different from how they used to be.



Frontal Lobe: This is the part of the brain where your personality lives. It also helps you to make decisions and figure stuff out. We sometimes say that the frontal lobe is like the conductor of an orchestra - it helps the other parts of the brain to work together in harmony.



If the person with the brain injury has hurt their frontal lobe then this could make them seem really different.

They might not feel or act like they used to, or be able to control when they feel happy or sad or angry.

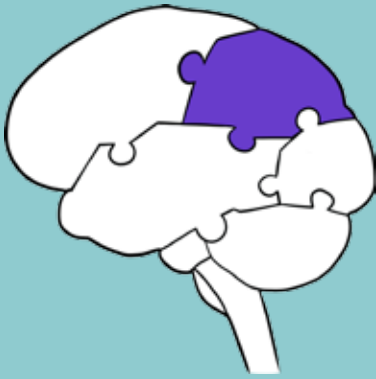


It might be really hard for them to make a decision, like what to watch on TV or if they want to play with you.



The extra effort needed to think things through could make the person really tired and need to sleep a lot.





Parietal Lobe: This is the part of the brain that helps you to move around in space, it's what stops you from bumping into things when you walk and run. It's also important for perception, which is how we use our senses to understand the world around us.

If the person with the brain injury hurts the part of the brain where the parietal lobe is, they might find it harder to make sense of the world around them.



They might keep walking into things even though they can see them.



Spelling and knowing numbers can be harder too, even though they might have been really good at this before.





Temporal Lobe: This is the part of the brain that helps you to understand language and sound. It's really important for hearing and understanding words. It also helps you with making and saving memories.



If the person with the brain injury hurts their temporal lobe, this can have a really big effect on how they talk and communicate.



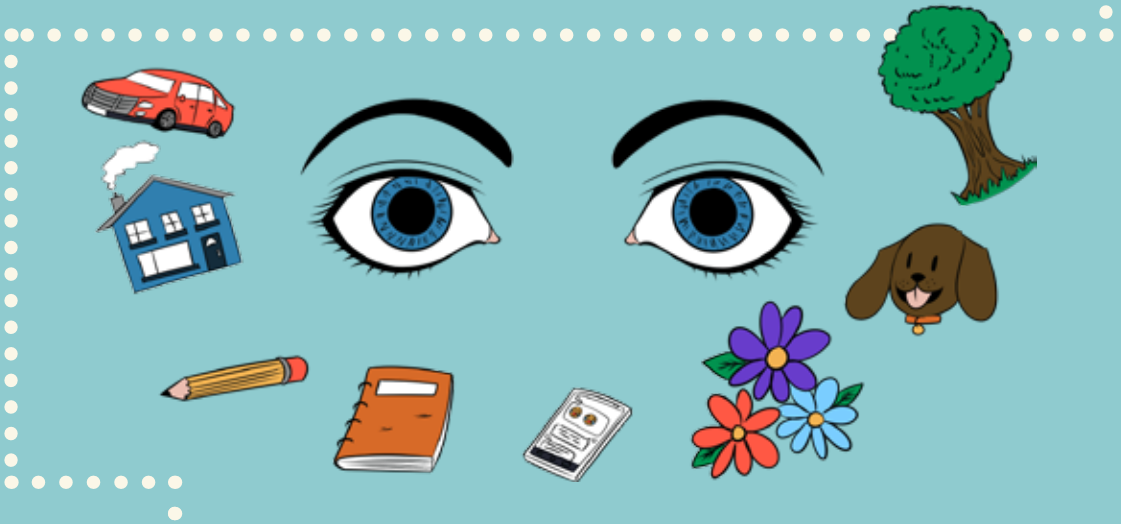
They might not be able to understand words any more, or find the right words to have a conversation that makes sense.



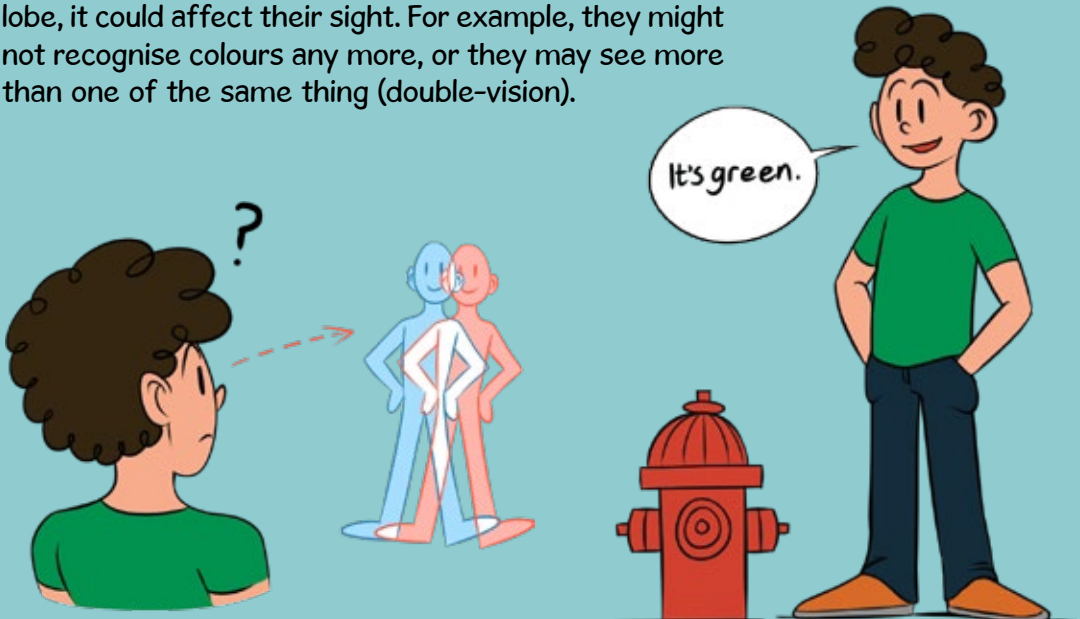
They might also have trouble remembering things, like your name. This can be very frustrating and can make the person feel angry, sad and tired.



Occipital Lobe: This is the part of the brain that interprets what we see around us. It takes the images we see through our eyes and helps us to understand what they are so that we know what we are looking at.



If the person with the brain injury hurts their occipital lobe, it could affect their sight. For example, they might not recognise colours any more, or they may see more than one of the same thing (double-vision).



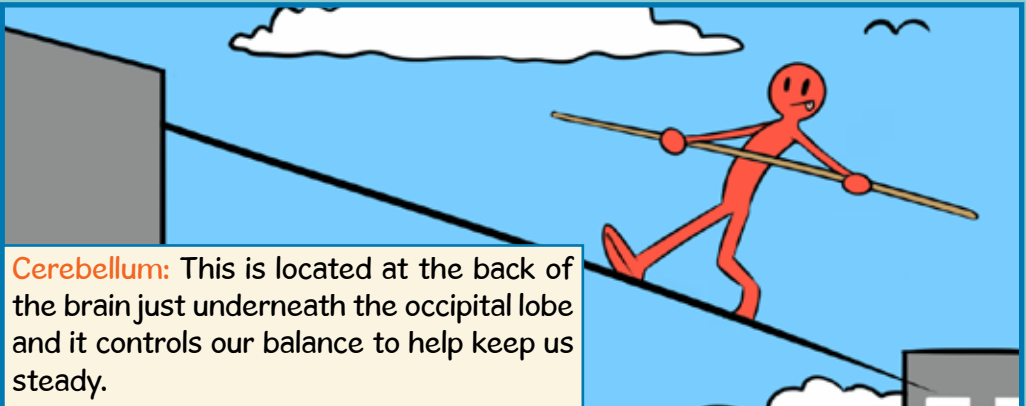
Other important parts of the brain are the **Limbic System**, the **Cerebellum** and the **Brainstem**.



Limbic System: This is the oldest part of the brain, meaning it was one of the first parts of the brain to grow when we were still cave people. It's important for things like breathing, body temperature, memory and emotions. It helps us know when to be afraid of things and when we are in danger.



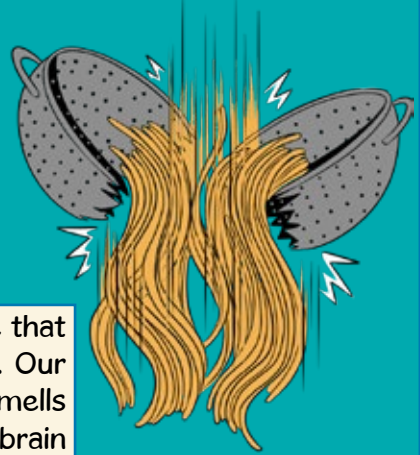
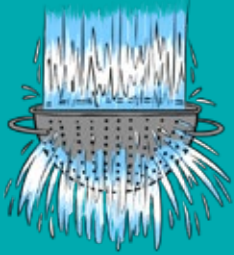
Brainstem: The brainstem connects our brain to the rest of our body. It feeds into the spinal cord along our back, which contains the nerves and signals that move our arms and legs. It also lets blood and oxygen enter the brain so is really important for keeping us alive.



Cerebellum: This is located at the back of the brain just underneath the occipital lobe and it controls our balance to help keep us steady.



Our senses are how we understand the world around us. We have lots of them, but the five main senses we use all the time are: sight, smell, taste, touch, hearing.



Our senses have a filter in them, like a sieve that lets the water out but catches the pasta. Our sensory filter helps to catch sounds and smells and images that we do not need. Having a brain injury can break this filter.

Something called sensory overload can happen, where your brain tries to take in all of the information you see and hear at once...so that the filter breaks.



When this happens, people can need to stop and have everything be quiet for a while. Even something as small as walking into a room where lots of people are talking can break the filter.

Sensory overload can be so difficult for some people that it feels like their brain is hurting. They might shout at you to be quiet.



They might need to go and lie down in a quiet room. This is their brain telling them it needs a break.



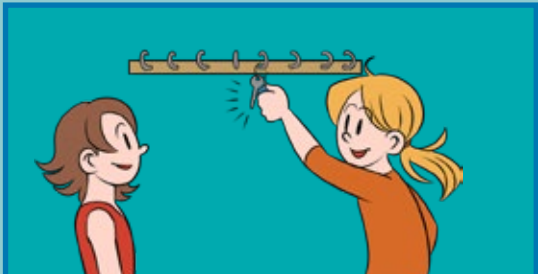
Memory is one of the most important jobs your brain does. It's also one of the most complicated! We use lots of different parts of the brain to make a memory.



This is why many people with a brain injury seem to be forgetful – there's a much bigger chance of affecting your memory because it needs so much of your brain to work.



To make a memory, we need to be able to pay attention, to understand the information, to store the information and then recall it when we need it.



All of these parts have to work together. If one part is not working any more, then making a new memory will be much harder.

There are some things we can do to help someone who has trouble with their memory.

Write everything down. Having a noticeboard or notebook where they can write down important things can be a big help. You can write in it with them or by remind them to look at their notebook.

Take photos. If you are doing something fun with the person with the brain injury, take lots of photos and videos. You can look at them together after and this might help them to remember the nice time you had together.

Try not to move their stuff. It can be important for someone with memory problems to have one place where they put the things they use every day. If you borrow something, make sure you put it back in this place.





The brain works really hard when we're having a conversation. One part is making sense of what the other person is saying. Another part is deciding what to say back, finding the right words to put into sentences. A different part is telling the muscles around your mouth to form words, and making your vocal chords produce the right sounds.



An injury to the brain could hurt one or more of these parts and they might stop working properly. Luckily, we can also tell people things by using pictures or body language - we are all experts in this already!



What's the first thing you see when someone is happy? A smile. So already we know something about a person just by looking at their face. We give the thumbs up when we like something, and wave at people to say hello. Another easy way of talking without words is to draw pictures instead, letting the images tell the story.



It can be really fun to have a conversation without using any words, and the more you practice the better you get.



Tips for helping someone who has trouble with words

Speak slowly and clearly. It will be a big help. Don't be afraid to ask them nicely to repeat something if you don't understand.

Having a conversation can be tiring for someone who has trouble with words, they might need to take a break and try again later.

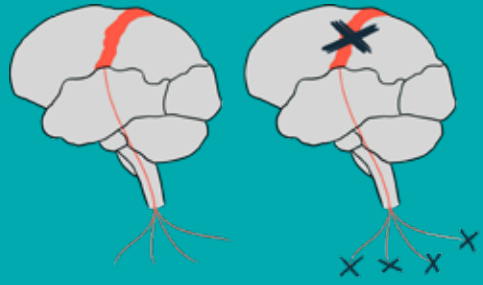
If they say the wrong word or swear a lot this is not something they can control. Please don't laugh, it might make them embarrassed or upset.

Be patient, it might take them a long time to say one sentence. Don't rush them, give them the time they need.

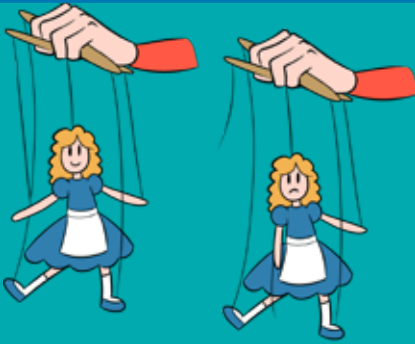




The brain is in control of every movement we make. When we want to move our legs to walk and our hands to play computer games, the brain sends a signal to our muscles so that we can do this. These signals come from something called the motor cortex, which runs right across the top of your brain.



After a brain injury, these signals can be interrupted. Even though the person's hands and legs might not have been hurt, if the part of the brain that tells them what to do doesn't work any more, then the muscles won't know how to move.



Have you ever seen a puppet show? Puppets can only move when there is a person behind them controlling the strings connected to their arms and legs. If one of the strings breaks, or if the person controlling them isn't there, then the puppet can't move. Similarly, if the brain stops controlling our arms and legs, they can't move either.



If this happens, the person with the brain injury might need some help to get around. They may need to use a walking stick or wheelchair. They may even need help to get dressed, or to make food.



It can be difficult for people to ask for help to do things they used to find easy, so you can help by offering to give them a hand and using it as a way to spend time with them.



Let them know they have nothing to be embarrassed about and that maybe they can help you out with something in return.

We have lots of different emotions and feelings but there are 6 emotions that we may feel more than the others. These are joy, sadness, anger, fear, disgust and surprise.



Our brain helps us to control our emotions. As we get older, our brain changes and we get better at managing our emotions. We learn that if we get angry in school or in public, that it's not ok to shout. We know that if someone tells us a funny joke when we are at a funeral, that it is not ok to laugh out loud. This is called a social skill and it helps us to know how to behave.



We all have different levels of emotions. We can turn our emotions up or down, like the volume on the TV. We know the difference between a really funny joke that makes us laugh so hard that we cry, or just feeling happy and wanting to smile. We might feel a little bit sad if someone goes on holiday and we don't see them for two weeks, but we know this is very different from the big sadness when somebody dies.



If a brain injury hurts the part of the brain that controls someone's emotions, then it can be like the volume getting stuck at the highest level on the TV. All of their emotions might be really loud all the time. They might shout at you for things that you did not know would make them angry.

It can also happen that the volume turns down the opposite way, and all the emotions might go silent. If this happens the person with the brain injury might not be able to feel or show when they are happy, sad or angry.





IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT.

Sometimes a person with a brain injury just doesn't seem like themselves any more. It can almost be like they are a completely different person and an alien has come and taken over their body. They might be tired all the time now. They might not want to play or talk to you as much. They might get angry. They might say and do things that are embarrassing in front of your friends. They might sound strange when they talk. They might not be able to look after you. They might need your help with small things like making tea or getting dressed - things they used to know how to do before.



It's really important to remember that they are different because they had a brain injury. The brain is in charge of everything we do. So when it gets hurt, it can make big changes happen.

No one chooses to have a brain injury. No one chooses to get hurt and become a different person.

It's not their fault. It's also not your fault. They have not changed because of anything you did. If they are different, it is because of the way they hurt their brain. Even if the person with the brain injury is angry or sad a lot, they are not angry or sad because of you. Having a brain injury can be really hard and they will need some time to get used to being different. There are lots of things you can do to help.



These are some things that you can do to help someone who has had a brain injury. Simple things can make a big difference to them, and to you.

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Talk to them about the brain injury. It's helpful to try and not be afraid of the changes, but to understand them instead. The best way to do this is to talk to the person. Ask questions and explain to them that you would like to help.

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Remember that they might need more breaks and rest than you do. Even if you are full of energy and want to play and run around, the person with the brain injury might not have as much energy. Try to be patient and ask them to let you know when they feel good, and ready to do things. Try to choose activities and games that are quieter, but still fun.

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Be aware of distractions. Remember the sensory overload? If you need to talk to the person with a brain injury, try to do it when they are not already doing something else. Turn off the TV if you want to have a chat, or go to a quieter room. This will help to make sure they do not get overwhelmed, tired, or frustrated.

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Help them to practice. People sometimes have exercises they need to do after a brain injury, this is their homework to help them feel better. Ask them if they would like you to do the exercises with them, or just be there to keep them company.

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Try to be patient. The person with the brain injury might move more slowly, think more slowly, speak more slowly. This is ok and you might need to learn to slow down with them.



..... Some information that might help

Here are some websites that are fun to look at and can help you to learn more about the brain.

<http://comics.tbi.washington.edu/home>

TBI InfoComics, a series of webcomics filled with information about the effects of brain injury.

<http://channel.nationalgeographic.com/brain-games/>

Brain Games on the National Geographic Channel has loads of short videos, games and episodes all about the brain and how it works.

If you need to talk to someone about how you are feeling about brain injury, or anything else that might be making you feel upset then you should talk to an adult you trust. This could be a teacher, an older brother or sister, an aunt or uncle, a coach, or your Mum or Dad. If you can't talk to them you can call Childline on 1800 66 66 66 and someone will be there to listen and help.

