The A to Z of Growing Up: a guide for social workers and counsellors

The A to Z of Growing Up gives social workers and counsellors 93 ready-made, photocopiable worksheets for adolescents aged 12 to 18, for use in individual sessions, groups and between-session tasks.

The workbook is a **psychoeducational and reflective tool**. Each topic explains an idea in plain language, then asks the young person to think and write about it. Junior prompts suit ages 12 to 14 and senior prompts suit ages 15 to 18.

It is not a diagnostic or screening instrument, and it is not a treatment programme. Checklists in topics such as Depression and Mental Health help a young person notice and name what they feel. **They do not measure severity or replace a clinical assessment.**

Several topics draw on established approaches, which helps you fit them into your own way of working:

- **Acceptance, Negative Self-Talk, Negative Thoughts:** acceptance and defusion skills from ACT, and noticing and answering unhelpful thoughts from CBT.
- **Emotions, Keeping Your Cool, Self-Regulation, Zones:** naming feelings and choosing a response, as in emotion-regulation work and DBT skills.
- **Resilience, Coping Skills, Hope:** protective factors and coping strategies.
- **Identity, Roots and Faith, Values:** meaning-making and values, useful in narrative and strengths-based practice.

Ways to use it

Setting	How the workbook helps
First sessions	*All About Me* gives a gentle, low-pressure way to build rapport and learn about the young person's world.
Individual sessions	One topic gives a session its focus. The young person writes, you explore what they wrote.
Between sessions	A single worksheet works as a short take-home task to keep the work going.
Groups	Topics can be sequenced into tailor-made programmes of 6 to 8 sessions, with discussion questions from the facilitator notes.
Parents and guardians	A completed page, shared with the young person's permission, can open a conversation at home.
Ending	Revisiting an earlier page shows the young person how their thinking has changed.

© Waheeda Joosab. All rights reserved.
This guide may be printed and shared free of charge for non-commercial use, provided it is not altered and this notice is kept. For more information about The A to Z of Growing Up, visit www.whatwaydsays.co.za/a-z-of-growing-up

Topic finder

Start from what the young person brings, then choose topics to open the conversation and to build skills. The last column lists signs that call for more than workbook support.

Presenting concern	Start with	Build with	Watch for
Low mood	Emotions, Depression	Negative Thoughts, Hope, Low Energy and Motivation, Coping Skills	Low mood or irritability most days for two weeks or more; any talk of self-harm or not wanting to live
Worry and anxiety	Anxiety, Worrying	Nerves and Nervousness, Mindfulness, Inner Peace, Stress	Panic attacks, avoiding school, worry that stops daily life
Stress and pressure	Stress	Self-Regulation, Procrastination, Tests and Exams, Sleep	Exhaustion, physical symptoms, using substances to cope
Grief and loss	Grief, Letting Go	Emotions, Coping Skills, Resilience, Roots and Faith	Grief that stays intense over many months, or trauma symptoms after a sudden death
Anger and conflict	Anger, Keeping Your Cool	Communication, Apologising, Forgiveness, Self-Regulation	Violence, threats, carrying weapons, harm to others
Low self-worth	Self-Worth, Me, Myself and I	Negative Self-Talk, Comparison, Unique Strengths, Quirks, Confidence	Self-hatred, self-harm, withdrawal from everyone
Body image	Body Image	Comparison, Acceptance, Tech and Screens, Healthy Choices	Restricting food, bingeing, purging or compulsive exercise: refer for an eating disorder assessment
Bullying	Bullying	Boundaries, Assertiveness, Belonging, Online Identity and Safety	Ongoing victimisation, cyberbullying with images, fear of going to school
Friendship and peer problems	Friendships, Belonging	Loyalty, Jealousy, Trust, Communication, Relationships	Isolation, peer pressure towards risky behaviour
Family conflict and change	Relationships, Communication	Boundaries, Forgiveness, Acceptance, Letting Go	Any sign of abuse or neglect at home: follow safeguarding procedures

© Waheeda Joosab. All rights reserved.
This guide may be printed and shared free of charge for non-commercial use, provided it is not altered and this notice is kept. For more information about The A to Z of Growing Up, visit www.whatwaydsays.co.za/a-z-of-growing-up

Presenting concern	Start with	Build with	Watch for
Identity and belonging	Identity, Belonging	Values, Roots and Faith, Diversity and Difference, Youth: Growing Up	Distress linked to discrimination, or rejection by family or community
Online life and screens	Tech and Screens, Digital Wellbeing	Online Identity and Safety, Comparison, Sleep, Boundaries	Sextortion, sharing of intimate images, contact from adults online: report urgently
Risky choices	Healthy Choices, Gut Feeling	Decisiveness, Boundaries, Vulnerability, Assertiveness	Substance dependence, unsafe sexual behaviour, exploitation
Motivation and school	Goals, Procrastination	Focus, Concentration, Attendance, Excuses, Growth Mindset, Perseverance	Sudden drop in marks or attendance, which may signal something else
Setbacks and failure	Failure, Resilience	Growth Mindset, Perseverance, Optimism, Determination	Hopelessness after a setback
Future and direction	You and Your Future Self, Purpose	Dreams, Career Calling, Future Self, Quest, Financial Fitness, Working With What You Have	Hopelessness about the future
Guilt and shame	Guilt	Apologising, Forgiveness, Acceptance, Vulnerability	Shame linked to abuse or a secret the young person is afraid to tell

Session formats

An individual session (about 50 minutes)

1. **Check in (5 minutes).** How has the week been? Revisit anything from last time.
2. **Introduce the topic (10 minutes).** Read the explanation together or let the young person read it alone. Ask what stands out.
3. **Write (15 minutes).** The young person works on the prompts. Stay nearby and available, without reading over their shoulder.
4. **Explore (15 minutes).** Invite them to share what they choose to. Use the facilitator notes' discussion questions as starting points, not a script.
5. **Close (5 minutes).** Agree one small thing to try or notice before next time. Check how they are feeling before they leave.

Give the young person the choice of keeping their pages, leaving them with you, or taking them home.

© Waheeda Joosab. All rights reserved.
This guide may be printed and shared free of charge for non-commercial use, provided it is not altered and this notice is kept. For more information about The A to Z of Growing Up, visit www.whatwaydsays.co.za/a-z-of-growing-up

Sample tailor-made group programmes (4 programmes, 6 sessions each)

Groups work best with 6 to 10 young people of a similar age band. Agree ground rules in the first session: what is shared stays in the room, no one has to share, and you will explain the limits of confidentiality.

Session	Sample Programmes			
	Self-worth and confidence	**Coping with stress**	**Friendships and belonging**	**Grief and change**
1	All About Me	All About Me	All About Me	All About Me
2	Me, Myself and I	Stress	Belonging	Emotions
3	Negative Self-Talk	Worrying	Friendships	Grief
4	Comparison	Self-Regulation	Trust	Letting Go
5	Unique Strengths	Coping Skills	Communication	Coping Skills
6	Confidence	Resilience	Kindness	Hope

Screen young people individually before placing them in a grief group. Someone in the first weeks after a sudden or traumatic loss usually needs individual support first.

Ethics, safeguarding and referral

The workbook invites young people to write honestly, so disclosures will happen. Plan for them before the first session.

- **Confidentiality and its limits.** Explain, in words the young person understands, what stays private and when you would have to tell someone. Do this before they write anything, and again when a group begins.
- **Mandatory reporting.** Section 110 of the Children's Act requires social workers, psychologists, teachers and other listed professionals to report a reasonable conclusion that a child has been abused or deliberately neglected. Reports go to a designated child protection organisation, the provincial Department of Social Development or the police, on Form 22. Section 54 of the Sexual Offences Act also requires anyone who knows of, or reasonably suspects, a sexual offence against a child to report it to the police. Reporting rules for consensual sexual activity between adolescents are complex, so take advice from your supervisor or professional body.
- **Risk of harm.** If a young person discloses thoughts of self-harm or suicide, do not leave them alone, do not promise secrecy, and follow your organisation's risk protocol. Involve parents or guardians unless home is the source of harm, in which case follow the safeguarding route.
- **Consent.** Follow your organisation's policy and your professional body's guidance (SACSSP for social workers, HPCSA for psychologists and registered counsellors) on consent for work with children and on involving parents or guardians.

© Waheeda Joosab. All rights reserved.
This guide may be printed and shared free of charge for non-commercial use, provided it is not altered and this notice is kept. For more information about The A to Z of Growing Up, visit www.whatwaydsays.co.za/a-z-of-growing-up

- **Records.** A completed worksheet kept in a file becomes part of the young person's record. Store it as you would any confidential case note, in line with POPIA, and agree with the young person what happens to their pages.
- **Scope.** Refer on when a young person's needs go beyond your role or beyond what a reflective workbook can offer: suspected psychiatric conditions, eating disorders, trauma symptoms, substance dependence or ongoing risk.

South African helplines

Check these numbers before printing handouts, and add the local services you refer to.

Service	Number	For
SADAG Suicide Crisis Helpline	0800 567 567	Suicidal thoughts and mental health crises, 24 hours
Childline South Africa	116	Children and teenagers in any kind of trouble, free and 24 hours
LifeLine	0861 322 322	Counselling for anyone in crisis

Adapting the work

- **Age and maturity.** Choose junior or senior prompts by the young person's maturity, not only their age. An older teen in crisis may need the simpler junior prompts.
- **Literacy and language.** Read the page aloud together, let the young person draw or answer in their home language, or talk through the prompts while you write their words down.
- **Trauma-informed practice.** Offer choice at every step: which topic, which prompts, whether to share. Never insist on writing or sharing. Watch for signs of overwhelm and slow down or stop.
- **Faith and culture.** Many young people draw strength from faith, family and community. Invite them to bring these in, and never assume what they believe.
- **Families.** With the young person's permission, a parent or guardian can work through the same topic separately. Comparing answers can open a useful conversation.
- **Online activities.** QR codes in the book link to free interactive tools (Circle of Control, Emotion Check-in, the Inner Critic quiz and When You Belong Nowhere). **They need no registration or sign-in**, and answers stay on the young person's own phone. Results may be screenshot if necessary. Online activities are smart-board friendly for demonstration or group practice purposes.

Licensing for practices

A practitioner who buys the book may photocopy learner worksheets for their own clients. Facilitator notes are not for copying. An organisation where several practitioners use the book, or that runs groups across sites, needs a site licence: contact info@whatwaydsays.co.za.

© Waheeda Joosab. All rights reserved.
This guide may be printed and shared free of charge for non-commercial use, provided it is not altered and this notice is kept. For more information about The A to Z of Growing Up, visit www.whatwaydsays.co.za/a-z-of-growing-up