

# Talking Mental Health Guide

## How to approach difficult conversations

It can be hard to know how to talk about your mental health, especially when you're struggling. But talking can be incredibly helpful to make sense of and manage difficult experiences.

Here are some things you might want to consider when finding the words:

**Plan beforehand.** When you are struggling it can be hard to articulate how you are feeling so it might help to wait until you are in a calm space and map out what you want to say with bullet points.

**Think about timing.** There is no right time to speak up, but so that you are able to say what you need to, try to find a time when you know you won't need to rush off or the other person is distracted. Also find a time when you feel a bit calmer. Imagine you've got an 'emotional thermometer' and wait until you aren't too hot, and also not so switched off from your feelings that you are too 'cold'. Being in the middle range, when you can really think about what you want to say, is the best time to open up about your thoughts and feelings.

**Who to tell.** Find a person you trust and who you can be in contact with easily. It doesn't need to be someone in your family, or even necessarily the person you hang out with most. But the person who will be able to understand how you feel is what counts the most.

**Where to talk.** Find a place you feel comfortable. Maybe in your bedroom, over a cup of tea at home, over lunch break in the park or in a quiet corner of the playground.

**Take courage.** We all have good days and days when life is more of a struggle. That's OK. Remember how incredibly brave you are by opening up. A range of feelings is what makes a person interesting and actually what brings us close to other people, so don't worry that expressing a bad or negative feeling will put people off. Funnily enough, it might bring people closer.

## How to be there when someone speaks up

Because there are so many misconceptions and stigma around mental health problems, choosing to speak about these can be very difficult. So, if a friend, loved one or colleague talks to you about some of their difficulties, there are useful ways that you can support them and:

**Listen.** This may be the first time that they have spoken to anyone about how they are feeling. Give them space to find the words, listen patiently, and acknowledge their important feelings and experiences.

**Ask questions.** Being curious and asking about someone is better than assuming that you always know how they feel. Even if it's something you've been through yourself, the chances are that they will be having a different experience to you, so ask as many open and curious questions as you like, without being intrusive.



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**Offer empathy.** Sometimes people believe that no one else in the world feels the way they do or understands them. Let them know that you're not judging them and that you get how they feel. And remember: if you feel you do not know how to help the other person it is OK to say so and it is OK to seek advice.

**Think about your language.** Try not to lecture people or assume that the way they are feeling is equivalent to what you or others may have experienced.

**Keep in contact.** Let them know that you are, and will be, there for them and are willing to talk and support when necessary.

**Be kind to yourself.** If you have ever been on an airplane they always ask you to put your own oxygen mask on first before you offer help to others. So remember to look after yourself, too.

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## How to help children talk mental health

Having conversations about mental health can help children and young people by making them feel less isolated. But sometimes children and young people won't or aren't able to share how they are feeling. Sometimes a prompt or check in is important. Let the unsaid be said and ask "Is there something you want to say?". Also consider that:

**You can talk too much and you can talk not enough!** Begin by putting yourself in your child's shoes then ask yourself "Is this the right time to talk?".

**Pick your moment.** Try and find moments when your child is in a reflective state of mind when they may be able to offer you some information about what has been happening, especially if you express genuine curiosity, as opposed to an interrogatory questioning that will have them running to their bedroom!

**Stay with the feeling.** Tempting as it may be to reassure your child, or jolly them along, if they say they feel 'scared', 'lonely' or just even 'unsure', staying with the negative is important.

**Friendships really matter.** The older children get, the more likely they are to share experiences with their friends. This is to be encouraged. Facilitating a move away from family to peer group is an important part of every child's development.

**Check in with yourself.** If you are a parent, carer or teacher, try to manage your own feelings or worries. A worried or anxious face in the classroom or at home suggests to children that how they are feeling can't be managed. So try to get your own feelings in check before you start asking children about their own. It will really help.



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