

Talking to Young People About Mental Health

Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to her or his community.

World Health Organisation, 2014

For young people, talking to a teacher about their mental health can be one of the most difficult things they will do. They will often spend long periods of time thinking, rehearsing and practising how to have the conversation.

They may even work up the courage to talk, but then miss the opportunity to do so. It might take them multiple attempts at trying to talk before finally finding the right time.

If your role brings you into regular contact with children and young people, you will be in a position to observe changes in their physical and mental health.

Being mindful of behaviours, recognising any changes and having open and honest conversations about mental health can be a powerful tool for intervention and creating a supportive environment.

All schools are under a statutory duty to promote the welfare of their pupils. As a safeguarding professional, you have an essential role in promoting positive mental health among students.



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Top tips for having a supportive conversation

Opening a Conversation

Having a sensitive conversation often makes all parties anxious, thinking through how to open the conversation will help you approach conversations with confidence.

How you open the conversation is determined by who initiates it. Generally starting with simple broad questions can help a young person open up and stay calm.

Remember there is an inherent power imbalance and the young person may feel intimidated, scared, anxious or shy.

Suggested Phrases:

■ **It's nice to see you, I was hoping we could have a chat to make sure everything's going ok for you.**

■ **Can you help me understand how you've been feeling recently?**

■ **Can you help me understand how things are for you at home?**

□ What do you like about being at home?

□ What don't you like about being at home?

□ Who lives at home with you?

□ How have things been for you at school?

□ What's difficult about school? / What's enjoyable about school?

Active Listening

Active listening is more than just 'hearing'. It is listening with full concentration and signalling that you are listening. Maintaining eye contact, nodding your head, smiling, saying 'yes' or 'mmm' will show you are listening attentively.

Providing verbal and non-verbal feedback will help the student feel more at ease and will support them to communicate openly. Be mindful not to interrupt or hurry them. If they struggle to talk, it can help if you ask them to write it down.

This is an excerpt from the 'Managing Mental Health in Schools' CPD certified course available in the Safer Schools App. For more information about the Safer Schools Partnership, [click here](#), or visit [bit.ly/SaferAccess](#)

If you have immediate concerns about the life or safety of a child or young person, **you should contact the police on 999 (emergency number).**