



Tips for starting a conversation about mental health with secondary school children

For secondary schools and further education settings, the young person should be the one to initiate any conversation about their wellbeing or mental health.

Schools can introduce things like worry boxes or assigned 'time to talk' sessions, so that students have a clear route to initiate a conversation without feeling pressured. Schools can also signpost sources of support to students through displays in classrooms or hallways.

Education staff should avoid singling out a young person and questioning them about their mental health. If you are concerned about a young person, you should speak to your designated safeguarding lead first. If agreed with them, you can let the young person know that you are available if they need to talk.

Points to remember

- If a young person indicates that they want to speak to you, find an appropriate time and place where you won't be interrupted to have the conversation.
- If a young person discloses in class, offer empathy, invite them to talk in a safer, more private setting and talk to your designated safeguarding lead (DSL) for advice about how the situation should be managed.
- If a young person tells you their personal concerns, be clear what you will do with this information. If you are asked 'not to tell anyone' you will need to make it clear that this won't be possible, and that you will need to speak to others in the school about it.
- Check with the young person if there are other trusted adults (parents, the wider family, teachers) or friends they have talked to or could talk to.
- Listen carefully, be patient and friendly and give your full attention.
- Check your body language so that the young person knows you are focusing on them.
- Take what they're saying seriously. Don't over-react but don't try to minimise or dismiss what they are saying. Ask open questions to encourage them to talk.
- Be calm and acknowledge their feelings.
- Remember we are all different and young people will respond in their own unique way to their experiences.
- Remember that children with SEND (special educational needs & disability) may struggle even more to articulate their feelings and thoughts and may need extra support.
- Signpost young people to other sources of support if appropriate, including helplines.

Note: When supporting young people, there is no confidentiality. Talk to your designated safeguarding lead (DSL) if you are at all concerned and follow your school's safeguarding policy/procedures. Make sure the student knows you will not keep what they tell you to yourself, and may seek advice or guidance from other professionals.

