



starting a conversation with a young person about mental health

Conversations about mental health are helpful

Family and friends play a vital role in identifying and supporting a young person who's experiencing the impacts of mental ill-health.

Let your young person know that you care about them no matter what they're going through. This is important and helps encourage young people to seek support early to manage the impact of mental ill-health.

Evidence has shown that having supportive loved ones involved in mental health care creates and improves longer lasting, positive outcomes for young people.

Conversations about mental health can be challenging

Talking to young people about mental health can feel hard, especially when you or your young person are uncomfortable talking about sensitive topics like mental health.

There is no 'right way' to have these conversations. Different approaches work better for different people. It's OK to feel unsure about how or when to start these conversations. No one gets these conversations perfect but taking the time to learn more is a great start.

How do I know I need to have a conversation about mental ill-health?

Family members and friends can often tell when something isn't quite right. You might notice that a young person is acting differently, or there are changes to their behaviour.



If you notice changes, it's a good time to have a conversation about what might be happening in their life.

Tips for having the conversation

Having a conversation can feel overwhelming. Here are some tips for talking with your young person.

1. Check in with yourself

- Ensure that you're feeling calm and open to listening.
- Consider if it is the right time to have the conversation.
- Be aware of your body language and tone of voice.

2. Setting the scene

- Think about where.
- It can help to be side-by-side rather than looking directly at each other. Perhaps go for a drive, a walk, or somewhere your young person feels comfortable.

3. Be prepared to listen

- Listening to your young person is an important part of the process.
- Take their feelings seriously. Listen carefully, reflect back and don't judge (it can be more useful at times to say nothing than to offer solutions).
- Take a 'you and me vs the problem' approach. This lets them know you'll figure it out together.

4. Starting the conversation

- There are many ways to start the conversation. You could begin with general and open questions like: how is [e.g., school/sport] going?
- When focusing on more specific thoughts and feelings, 'I' statements are important: 'I feel like you/I've noticed you [haven't been yourself lately] – how are things?'

How you talk with your young person will depend on their age and understanding. The language you use should feel natural. If your young person talks about their mental health, reassure them that you're glad and relieved that they're talking to you, you're proud of them, and they're not alone in their journey.



To learn more about these tips visit the link via the QR code on the next page.

What if I am concerned about their safety?

If you are concerned about someone's safety it is important that you talk to them directly.

Here are some tips to help you:

- talk openly and honestly (this helps show them that you care)
- let them know that you are concerned about their safety
- acknowledge the difficulty of opening up about thoughts or feelings and reassure them it can help
- reassure them that you'll be there for them and ask what they need from you (they might not know what they need)
- if you're worried about suicide, ask direct questions, such as 'have you ever thought about suicide/ending your life?' (If you're not sure how you might feel hearing 'yes' to this question, seek professional support to help you manage the conversation)
- if you're worried they might self harm you can ask directly, try to understand their reasons and encourage them to seek professional support
- offer to work together to find information and appropriate services, such as headspace, and offer to go with them.

My young person doesn't want support

Sometimes young people might say there isn't anything wrong and/or refuse help (either verbally or through body language). This can feel overwhelming for family or friends who are unsure what they can do. It's OK for you to reach out for professional support in your role as family.

It's OK to raise your concerns again and again. Opening up can take time so it's important to reflect and keep trying. You could also try different approaches.



Sometimes support is continuing to let a young person know you're there until they're ready to access support and that you won't give up on them.

Self-care

Caring for a loved one who is experiencing a hard time can have an impact on you. Looking after yourself is important as it leaves you better placed to provide help. Importantly, it also lets you show your young person how you manage life's ups and downs.



Getting support

For more information and resources for family and friends, or to join a group chat with other parents, visit headspace.org.au/online-and-phone-support or call 1800 650 890. You can also search for your nearest headspace centre online, or contact Parent HelpLine.

Here are some other ideas on where to access support:

- suggest other people the young person could talk to like a trusted adult, GP or online/telephone service like eheadspace
- access your own support – clinicians can work with family members to help them support their young person
- access support as a family – family therapy can sometimes feel less confronting for a young person and can reduce feelings that they are 'the problem'
- attend a group parenting education program such as Tuning into Teens.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au

If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

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