Starting a conversation about how your child is feeling

Bupa

It can be hard to find the words to open up these kinds of conversations. Which is why we've created these simple questions and prompts for parents to use with young people. We hope by using these, you can start a positive dialogue with your child, and provide a space for them to feel heard.

For additional support and guidance, or if you're worried about your child's mental health, you can find further advice, signs to look out for and support for families in our Guide for Parents and Carers.

For parents

On the next page, you'll find a set of questions designed to help open a positive conversation with your child about how they're feeling. There are also some example prompts you might like to use to show your child you're really listening to them.

Although these questions and prompts are an excellent starting point, you know your child best, and you may wish to ask other questions in response to what they're telling you. What's most important is that they feel heard and understood.

And remember, your child may find it easier to communicate in ways other than talking - like writing or texting. You can find additional advice and tips on starting a conversation in our Guide for Parents and Carers.

For your child

It can be hard for young people to talk about their feelings and tell you what support they might need right now.

Included in this pack is a 'Saying what you need' page. Sharing this with your child could help them identify what support they need right now if they're struggling to tell you. You might want to show them on-screen, or print off the page to share with them. Either way, they can simply tell you or point at what they feel they need at that moment.

Remember, they might want something else not included, or might find it hard to decide exactly what they need. What's most important, is not putting any pressure on them, and being there to listen to them when they want to share.

Begin by asking these questions

To make these conversations the best they can be, it helps to find a time and place where you both feel comfortable and won't be interrupted. Young people often find it easier to open up when they're in a relaxed environment. Smaller, more regular, chats may also be an option. Or you may want to check in every week or so. Whatever helps put you both at ease.

Conversation starters

1. How was your day? Would you mind telling me about something that happened?

2. What was the best bit of your day?

3. Was there anything you didn't like about today?

4. Who did you hang out with today?

5. Did anything make you feel proud today?

6. If you could restart your day, would you like to do anything differently?

7. What are you most looking forward to this week?

8. Is there anything you're not looking forward to this week?

9. What do you like most about school? And is there anything you're less keen on?

Dig a little deeper

10. Is there anything on your mind?

11. Are you feeling worried about anything at the moment?

12. What do you think would make you feel better?

13. Is there anything you'd like us to do to improve things?

14. What can I do (or not do) to help you feel better?

15. If you could ask me anything, what would it be?

Show your child you're listening

Verbal prompts like these can help...

- I hear what you're saying

- I understand where you're coming from

- I can see how that must make you feel

- I'm hearing that you feel [worried / scared / stressed]

- Everybody feels stressed sometimes

- You can tell me anything

- I'm always here to listen

- I always have time for you

- I know this feels huge right now, and we can think about this together

- You're not alone in this, we can work it out together

Non-verbal cues are useful too, like:

- Nodding

- Making eye contact (but not staring)

- Not looking at your phone

- Noises of acknowledgement, such as 'mm hm'

Child

Saying what you need

What do you feel like you might want right now?
It's OK if it's something else not on this list,
or if you want to talk about it some more.
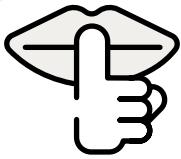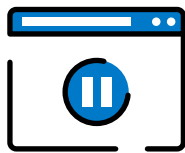
Someone to listen
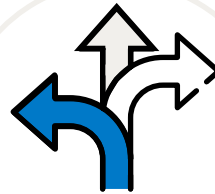
A hug

A hot drink

Some space

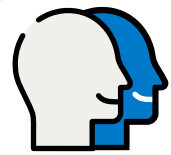Some quiet

A pause

A change

A walk outdoors

Play a game or hobby

Friend time

Family time

A laugh or fun together

Watch a film or listen to music

A nap or early night

Talking to friends

Talking to someone else