

*Helping  
you to help  
your child*

# Tips for Starting Mental Health Conversations

Practical tips for positive conversations  
when you're worried about someone's  
mental health



It can be hard to know how to start the conversation when you're worried

## Introduction

If you're worried about a friend, a child in your care or a colleague and you feel you need to have a conversation about their mental health or emotional wellbeing and you don't know where to start, you're not alone!

Many people are unsure about how to start the conversation, so here are some ideas, inspired by people whose friends or loved ones did start the conversation.

Good luck, you've got this...

*Pooky x*

# Persevere



If you're worried about someone, finding the courage to have the conversation once is likely not to be enough. They may have had ongoing issues for some time and they may be absolutely terrified to open up about them. They may fear the reaction they'll receive. They may be upset or confused about their own thoughts or feelings. They might simply not have the right words to say. So don't just ask once. Persevere with your offers of kindness and listening, you never know when the right moment for the conversation might arise.

*It took me a lot of time to be honest about what was going on. It was about the fifth time she asked that I finally admitted something was wrong*



## Chat whilst doing

This could be a pretty intense conversation and might simply feel a bit too much one-to-one. Talking about these issues whilst doing something else you both enjoy might help to break the ice a bit and let the conversation flow slightly less intensely.

If in doubt, get walking whilst you're talking. Things will feel less intense and the conversation will start to flow.

*My friend finally opened up to me when we were skating in the park. I guess it felt a bit less intense and we were relaxed*

# Say something

Even if you fumble over your words or don't say quite the right thing, saying something shows we care and it gets the conversation started. The more we're open to these conversations the more quickly we'll learn the right and wrong things to say. At the start, the only wrong thing to say is nothing at all.

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I didn't know what to say but eventually realised that the only wrong thing to say was nothing, so I just got on with it and started the conversation. It felt a bit awkward at first but not for long



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## Act normally

Just because they might have a mental health issue doesn't mean someone suddenly turns into a completely different person. Just talk to them as you always have – draw on the things that normally fuel your conversations and make you feel good together.

Remember what you love about them instead of being scared of the things you don't understand yet.

*My Mum gave me some really good advice, she said 'He's still your friend, nothing can change that, just talk to him like you would about anything else, he might be ill but he's not a different person.'*

# Don't judge

Those of us with mental health issues live in constant fear of judgement. A good friend, parent or carer never judges, they just open their arms and hearts and offer unconditional support.

Make it clear that you are that person from early on in the conversation; you won't believe the relief your words and actions will bring.

*I was worried about what my parents would think about me - it was really important to me to know that they wouldn't judge me because of my self-harm - but they didn't*

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## Let them tell their story

Don't assume or guess what the person you're worried about is going through or why they feel the way they do. Instead, just listen.

Let them tell their own story, even if that is slow or difficult at times. It can be hard, especially when they're just getting started with opening up, but it's their story, not yours – listening is the very most helpful and important thing you can do just now.



The most helpful thing my Dad did was just listen and let me talk



# Think about next steps

If the person you're worried about feels safe opening up to you, discuss with them what you might do together to try to make things a little easier. What support could you seek and how could you go about that together?

The journey is a lot less lonely and terrifying when you have someone to accompany you.



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*I was too scared to ask for any help, but my friend helped me realise why it was important, and she came with me too so I didn't have to do it all alone*

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- Thank You! -

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