Tips for talking with young people

We believe talking about mental health can help you and those around you to be happier and healthier.

Anyone who works with or cares for a young person has the opportunity to play an active role in supporting their mental wellbeing. Giving a young person the chance to open up and have a conversation about their mental health can reassure them that help is available and empower them to access appropriate support should they need to.

Starting a conversation is the first step on that journey.

Creating a safe space

- Give yourself plenty of time so you don’t appear to be in a hurry
- Meet in a neutral space such as a quiet room or pastoral room
- Sit down even if the other person is standing — it will make you seem less intimidating
- Make it clear that they are not in trouble

Talking tips

- Keep your body language open and non-confrontational
- Be empathetic and take them seriously
- Take into account cultural differences in communication styles e.g. how much eye contact is appropriate
- Keep the chat positive and supportive, exploring the issues and how you may be able to help
- Do not offer glib advice such as “pull yourself together” or “cheer up”

Useful questions to ask

- How long have you felt like this?
- How are you feeling at the moment?
- How can I help you?
- What kind of support do you think might help you?

How to listen

- Give the person your full focus and listen without interrupting
- Listen to their words, tone of voice and body language – all will give clues as to how they are feeling
- Accept them as they are. Respect the person’s feelings, experiences and values although they may be different from yours. Do not judge or criticise because of your own beliefs and attitudes
- Don’t make a moral judgement. Be genuine – show that you accept the person and their values by what you say and do
- Get on their wavelength. Place yourself in the young person’s shoes and demonstrate to them that you hear and understand what they are saying and feeling

What happens next?

- Keep the conversation going – follow up and ask them how they are doing. Reassure them that you are always here if they want to talk, and really mean it.
- Give reassurance that there are lots of sources of support and some of these might be available at home through parents/carers, through their place of education, by visiting their GP, or online. If appropriate, offer to go with them to seek support.

Take a look at our list of support organisations for young people
To learn more about how to support the mental wellbeing of young people, visit mhfaengland.org
Find us on social media by searching ‘MHFA England’

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