

# Take 10 Together toolkit for mental health conversations

For use with online delivery of Youth Mental Health Aware Half Day courses

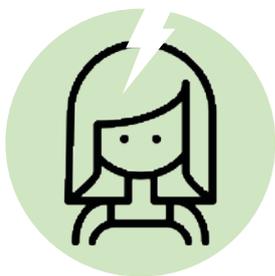


# Take Time Together toolkit for mental health conversations

## Signs of mental ill health in young people

Young people often experience particular circumstances that can lead to changes in their mental health and behaviours. Although similar life events will affect people differently, some life events carry a higher risk of affecting someone's mental health. Below are some early warning signs to look out for in young people. Often, the key to spotting mental ill health lies in noticing changes in the person.

### Physical



! Frequent headaches, stomach upsets, or minor illnesses

! Unexplained aches and pains

! Unexplained or frequent injuries



! Sleep problems, feeling tired all the time

! Incoherent speech



! Lack of care over appearance

! Altered energy levels

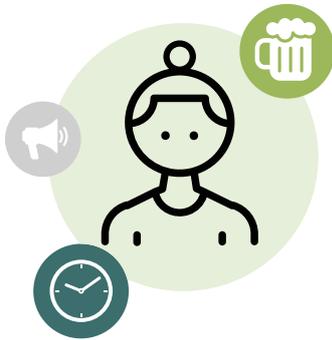
! Sudden weight gain or loss

## Emotional



- ! Tearful
- ! Angry
- ! Irritable
- ! Being louder or more lively than usual
- ! Loss of humour
- ! Fearfulness
- ! Suspiciousness
- ! Loss of confidence or self-esteem

## Behavioural



- ! Changes in appetite
- ! Drop in academic performance
- ! Appearing silent, withdrawn, or distracted
- ! Poor attendance/ timekeeping or increased sickness absence
- ! Difficulty concentrating, memory loss
- ! Alcohol and/or drug misuse
- ! Not participating in social activities
- ! Excessive risk-taking behaviour
- ! Uncooperative, disruptive, or aggressive behaviour
- ! Overworking

# Starting a conversation about mental health

We don't often talk about our mental health, so it might seem daunting to start a conversation about it. However, it is important to remember you don't have to be an expert. Giving a young person the opportunity to open up and have a conversation about their mental health can play a vital role in reassuring them that help is available. You can then signpost them to appropriate support.

Once you have spotted the signs of mental ill health, you can use the Take Time Together toolkit to start a conversation with the young person. Taking time to start a meaningful conversation about mental health can make a huge difference to a young person. Here are some ideas to get you started.



## 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 café, a quiet room, or a pastoral room
- You don't want to be disturbed, so turn your phone off or to silent
- Sit down even if the other person is standing – it will make you seem less intimidating
- Make it clear to the young person that they are not in trouble



## Talking tips

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



## Useful questions to ask

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



## How to listen

- Give the person your full focus and listen without interrupting
- Be aware of 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
- Be genuine – show that you accept the person and their values by what you say and do
- 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 their place of education, by visiting their GP, or online. If appropriate, offer to go with them to seek support
- Familiarise yourself with local, professional, online, and self-help resources so you can highlight some options

## Supporting young people in distress

People often fear saying the wrong thing when supporting someone. But simply encouraging them to talk, and listening in a non-judgemental way, can make a difference (63,64). Silence can also be very supportive and can enhance feelings of safety and comfort.

Asking what you can do to help gives the young person an opportunity to reflect on their needs and available resources. It can empower them to find practical solutions and ask for help.

Try to be positive. Offer praise and reassure them that support is available. If appropriate, encourage self-help strategies and/or accessing professional help. Don't label or stereotype. Explaining that their symptoms are common may reduce concerns about stigma.

Offer support rather than solutions. There is no right or wrong solution, but people are individuals and their experiences and needs may be different from yours. Offering to listen to their concerns or go for a walk can be invaluable.

Retain realistic expectations of your role. Be specific and clear about your availability and capacity to help.

## What if the young person reveals thoughts of suicide, or they are self-harming?

Suicide and self-harm are difficult to talk about. People are still afraid to ask directly about suicidal feelings, thoughts or plans. But if you are concerned about someone, don't let the taboo stop a conversation. You won't put thoughts in their head which aren't there already.

If you are concerned that a young person is thinking about suicide, ask them about this using a clear, direct, and sensitive

questions. You could say "I'm worried about you. Are you thinking about suicide?" or "It sounds like you're saying that life is not worth living. Are you feeling suicidal?"

Self-harm is an indication of deep distress, but it is not necessarily a suicidal action. It may be a way of controlling extreme emotions, and therefore a way of staying alive. However, if the person's mental health needs are not addressed, and they self-harm over longer periods, the risk of suicide increases.

The Take Time Together toolkit for having a mental health conversation still apply if a young person is self-harming or thinking about suicide, but the following is also important:

- Stay calm
- Stay with the person
- Tend to physical injuries if necessary
- Get them to professional help
- Call 999 in an emergency or 111 if it is less urgent

## Looking after yourself

Supporting someone in distress can be challenging, so it is vital to look after your own mental health afterwards. Seek support, for example from supervisors if you are at work, or the Samaritans (phone 116 123, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week). Talking to someone about your feelings is healthy. Other ways of looking after yourself include eating well, getting regular sleep and exercise, doing a hobby, and practising relaxation or mindfulness. You could also find other, creative ways to express your feelings.