

Parents & carers fact sheet

Supporting a young person who is struggling

Supporting a young person who is facing mental health challenges can feel overwhelming. Many parents feel unprepared and worry about saying or doing the right thing. Finding ways to best support someone is important as the rate of recovery can be really enhanced if there is a strong and understanding network around them.

Here are some strategies to help you support your child during difficult times and to try to help you foster a positive, understanding environment at home.

1 Encourage Open, Compassionate Communication

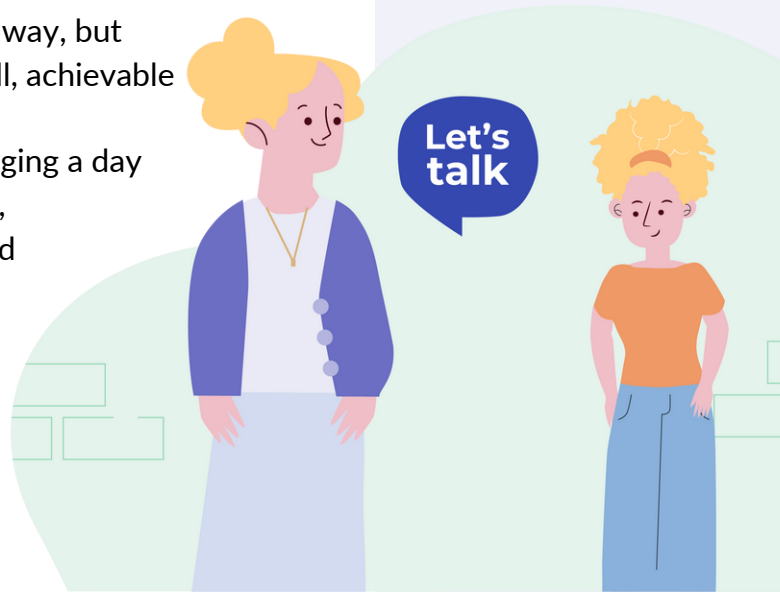
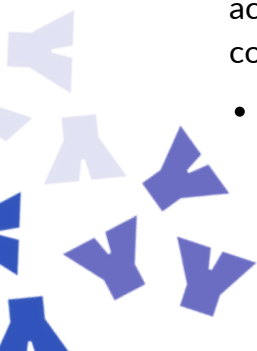
Creating a safe, open space where your child feels they can talk without judgment is vital. Some parents say that talking whilst on a walk or when driving can make it a bit easier as there is no pressure to make eye contact etc. Here are some things that can help:

- **Active Listening:** Show that you're fully present when they're talking by listening without interrupting. Avoid jumping in with solutions or advice unless they ask for it. Simple responses like, "I'm here for you," or "That sounds really hard," can help them feel understood.
- **Non-Verbal Cues:** Often, it's not just what you say but how you say it. Try to keep your tone calm, open, and reassuring. Use body language that shows you're engaged, like nodding and maintaining eye contact.
- **Validate Their Feelings:** Try not to minimise their experiences, even if they seem small to you. Recognising their feelings—whether it's anxiety, sadness, or frustration—helps them feel heard.

2 Focus on Small Steps, Not Quick Fixes

It's natural to want to help solve problems right away, but mental health progress takes time. Focus on small, achievable goals rather than "fixing" their feelings.

- **Celebrate Small Wins:** Whether it's managing a day at school or stepping outside for fresh air, acknowledge their efforts. This helps build confidence and motivation over time.
- **Be Patient:** Remind yourself that progress is gradual. Let go of any expectations for quick changes, and remember that being present is often more powerful than any "solution."



3 Model Self-Care and Healthy Coping Strategies

Young people observe and learn from the adults around them, so modelling positive coping strategies can be a powerful tool.

- **Lead by Example:** Share age-appropriate ways you manage stress or difficult days, such as taking a walk, practicing mindfulness, or talking to a friend.
- **Set Healthy Boundaries:** Support is essential, but constant check-ins can feel overwhelming. Aim for a balance between showing care and giving them space. You could ask, "Would you prefer to talk now or later?" to respect their comfort



4 Help Them Build Resilience and Problem-Solving Skills

While it can be tempting to offer answers, encouraging your child to develop resilience and self-confidence will be more beneficial long-term.

- **Empower Decision-Making:** Give them choices to help them feel in control. Asking questions like "What do you think could help in this situation?" allows them to explore their own ideas.
- **Problem Solving Together:** Encourage them to brainstorm solutions, big or small, instead of providing answers. This approach promotes independence and confidence in handling challenges.

5 Decline in school performance

Some struggles may require additional support from professionals, and knowing when to seek help is crucial.

- **Look for Red Flags:** Persistent withdrawal, severe mood changes, or self-harm are all signs that extra help may be needed. Trust your instincts if you feel something isn't right.
- **Support the Transition to Professional Help:** Reassure your child that additional support and/or counselling can be a valuable step. Presenting it as a team effort—"We're both working on this"—can make them feel less alone.
- **Talk to school/college:** It is helpful to talk to the school or college if the symptoms are affecting concentration or attendance - and let your child know what you are sharing with the school. The more information they have the more they can adapt the classroom and teaching to support them.
- **Sources of Support:** See our Information sheet on 'Sources of Support' to find services that are available to help.

6 Remember Your Own Wellbeing Matters Too

Supporting someone who's struggling can take an emotional toll. Prioritising your own mental and physical health ensures you can be a better support for your child.

- **Self-Care is Essential:** It's completely normal to feel worried, and at times even helpless. Taking breaks, seeking peer support, or connecting with other parents in similar situations can help you feel more grounded and prepared.
- **Avoid Burnout:** Recognise your own limits, and remember that seeking help for yourself is a positive step. When you're well, you'll have more to give.



Remember

There's no "right" way to support a young person going through a difficult time.

Every step you take to be present, listen, and model self-care makes a difference.

You're not alone in this—reach out for support when you need it, and remind your child that they are never alone, either.



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