

Helping Kids Dare to Share



Talking to kids about their mental health doesn't have to be complicated. If you notice that a child or teenager seems down, upset, angry, or withdrawn, let them know you're concerned and that you're available if and when they need to talk. Here are some suggestions to help get the conversation started:

- "I noticed you seem really down lately. I'm here if you want to talk."
- "Are you okay? It seems like you've had a hard week."
- "I'm here if you need me. I love you."
- "Let's check in when you have some time..."

Kids may take time to open up, and they might be unsure how to talk about what they're feeling. If a child isn't ready to share right away, be patient — and persistent. Check in regularly, and let them know you'll be there when they're ready to talk.

When a child is ready to share, taking the following steps can help them feel heard and supported:

- Give them your full attention. Listen patiently and don't interrupt.
- Let the child lead the conversation, and keep questions open-ended and nonjudgmental.
For example: "How did you feel when that happened?" or "What did you think about that?"

Don't minimize or dismiss kids' struggles, even if they seem trivial to you. Instead, take care to validate feelings and offer support. For example, instead of saying, "I'm sure things will work out," try saying, "That's so frustrating. I can see why you feel upset."

- Resist the urge to solve the problem right away — often, kids just need to talk. Ask what they want from the conversation: "I'm happy to offer advice, or just be here to listen, whatever you need."
- When the conversation is over, let the child know you're proud of them for speaking up, and that you'll be there to talk — or just listen — anytime they need support: "I'm sorry you're going through that, but I'm so glad you told me. I'm here anytime you need to talk."
- In some cases, a conversation is only the first step. If a child is experiencing mental health issues and might benefit from treatment, talk to them about reaching out to a clinician or doctor who can help.

If you are worried a child may be having thoughts of suicide or considering harming themselves or others, do not wait. Get help right away.

Dial 988 to reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.