

# Looking out for children and young people

**Good Thinking's quick guide to help parents and carers support their child if they are struggling with their mental health.**



In these challenging times, it's important to be kind and look out for those around you. Here at [Good Thinking](https://www.good-thinking.uk), London's digital mental wellbeing service, we have created this practical guide with three simple steps to help you check in with your child on a regular basis and see how they are – the more open everyone can be about their feelings, the better.

## STEP 1

# Spot the signs

It can be difficult to know if a child or teenager is struggling with their mental health but there are a few things you can look out for.



- Do they seem particularly sad, worried or overwhelmed or have they talked about feeling unhappy, hopeless or trapped?
- Are they often tired or lacking energy?
- Do they find it hard to control their emotions (e.g. are they often irritable, restless, tearful or extremely happy or excited)?
- Are they experiencing physical symptoms regularly (e.g. headaches and tummy aches)?
- Are they more distant than usual (e.g. are they talking to you or their friends less or not wanting to be around other people)?
- Have their behaviour or habits changed (e.g. are they eating or sleeping more or less or are they turning to coping mechanisms like alcohol or drugs)?
- Are they hurting themselves on purpose?
- Are they behaving differently on social media (e.g. spending more or less time online or getting stressed or upset by posts and comments)?
- Have their teachers, friends or other people in your child's life noticed any changes in their behaviour?

Use Good Thinking to learn more about the symptoms of stress, anxiety, mood disorders and sleep disorders.

## STEP 2

# Check in and let them know you care



It may not always be possible to spot the signs so it's really important to check how your child is feeling and to create a safe and supportive space for them to open up.

Use Thrive LDN's conversation starter developed with pupils and teachers to help you start a conversation with a young person about how they're feeling. You might want to do the following:



### Starting the conversation

#### ● Find a quiet space.

It's important to try and find a private comfortable space for you both, perhaps in the house, in a car or in a quiet public space, away from any distractions. Try to find a time where nothing is going to interrupt your conversation.

#### ● Initiating the conversation.

Once you've found a space, it can be helpful to ask how they are – but make sure you give them time to talk before you follow up with another question. Also be aware that they may not feel comfortable telling you or that this might not be the right time. It may be helpful to talk about something else first (e.g. their interests) before starting the deeper conversation.

*Shall we sit here, it's nice and quiet?*

*Let's find somewhere to have a chat?*

*It's nice to have time for us to catch up, how are you doing?*

*What happened in your day?*

*Are you feeling ok?  
I've noticed/heard that...?*

*Is there someone you would feel more comfortable talking to?*

## STEP 2

# Check in and let them know you care



### During the conversation

#### ● **Be a good listener.**

Listening is a key part of any conversation so ensure that you aren't distracted by any other task or person. Try to make eye contact and try to reflect back what they have told you. Perhaps wait before responding in case they have more to say. Avoid asking too many questions, relying too much on your own experience or jumping to conclusions – let them lead the conversation.

#### ● **Bringing your chat to a close.**

Having this conversation might be an emotional and exhausting experience for your child. Before bringing the conversation to a close, it can be helpful to consider how to end the conversation, perhaps with a hug, a calm down activity like a lie down, relaxing music, or by giving them space.

*You mentioned [example], how did that make you feel?*

*Do you mean [example]?*

*I remembered you said that [example] was worrying you, do you want to tell me?*

*How do you feel now, after having this conversation?*

*Would you like us to have a chat about this again?*

*It's been good to talk to you. I'm here when you need help.*

## STEP 2

# Check in and let them know you care



### Closing the conversation

**You don't need to have all the answers.**

As adults, we often want to help fix things but your child might only want to air the problem and not expect you to offer a solution. Please remember, there are lots of organisations and resources to support you and your child (see Step 3). Your conversation can be an opportunity to talk through the next steps and possible options for support so that they feel in control of what happens next.

*What would you like to do now?*

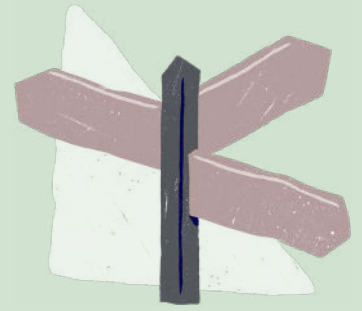
*I think we should look at getting you/us some support.*

*Would you like to talk about next steps or how to solve the problem?*

If your child tells you they are struggling with their mental health, be patient, listen and give them space to respond. Your acceptance and compassion can make a big difference. If they are reluctant to talk, reassure them that you are there for them if they ever want a chat.

## STEP 3

# Help them get the support they need



If your child chooses to confide in you, the most important thing you can do is show them that you care for them and want to help.

[Good Thinking](#) has a great range of advice, tools and support which are free and available 24/7 – for example, you could:

- Encourage them to try one of [Good Thinking's free NHS-approved apps](#) to help with lowering stress and anxiety, improving sleep and boosting mood, such as:
- Download the free [Combined Minds app](#) to help you understand common mental health conditions and learn how you can support your child.



An app for 11 to 19-year-olds to help manage symptoms of anxiety.



Feeling Good Teens is a programme of audio tracks for 10 to 15-year-olds to help develop self-esteem, mental resilience and motivation.

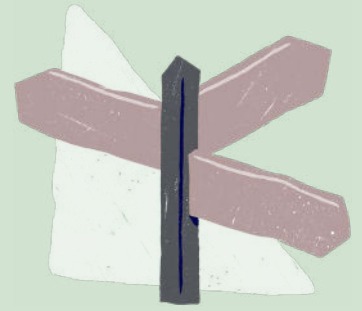


Designed by a teenage mental health charity to help families and friends support young people with their mental wellbeing.

- Explore Good Thinking's [library of expert advice for young people](#) where you'll find short guides with tips and resource recommendations to help you with a range of concerns, including dealing with bullying, eating disorders and anger.
- If your child has lost a loved one, share [Good Thinking's bereavement advice](#) with them and suggest they download the free [Apart of Me app](#), which has been developed by grief experts to help young people deal with loss.
- Suggest that they incorporate something from the [Five ways to good mental wellbeing](#) in their daily life.

## STEP 3

# Help them get the support they need



As well as encouraging your child to talk to other friends, family and people they trust, you could recommend that they look at some other online support services for children and young people, such as:



Provides young people with tools to look after their mental health.

Text YM to 85258



Supports positive mental health in teenagers with mental health information, apps and education.

Visit [www.stem4.org.uk](http://www.stem4.org.uk)



Free, confidential support for young people under 25 via online, social and mobile.

Call 0808 808 4994

Text THEMIX to 85258



Confidential support and advice for young people struggling with thoughts of suicide, and anyone worried about a young person.

Call 0800 068 41 41

Text 07860 039967



Shout offers free, confidential, 24/7 crisis text support.

Text SHOUT to 85258

Remember that it's important to look after yourself too. Talk to friends, family and other parents and carers and ask for help if you need it. If you are struggling with your own mental health, talk to your GP.



# Urgent support and professional help

If your support doesn't seem to be having much impact and changes in your child's emotions and behaviour start to affect how they live, don't worry – it's not your fault.

Sometimes people need professional support so perhaps you could:

- Make an appointment with their GP.
- Help them to contact a mental health charity via a phone (e.g. [Mind](#) or [Samaritans](#)) or text helpline (e.g. text YM to 85258) or online forum.
- If they are very distressed, call your [local 24/7 NHS mental health helpline](#) or NHS 111.
- Use [Good Thinking's self-assessment tool](#) (this is suitable for children ages 12 and up, and you can complete it for someone else) for a guiding diagnosis and if necessary, relevant treatment advice.

Visit [Good Thinking's Urgent Support page](#) for details of urgent support services and helplines available 24/7.

This guide has been developed by Good Thinking in partnership with:



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Partnership  
for Young  
London