

Starting Conversations...

Getting Started...

At times, it can be difficult to discuss with your child how they're feeling, especially if you are concerned that they are having hard time. You might be worried that you don't know what to say or how your child could react or respond...

Find a suitable time and place - this is important to help your child feel calm and comfortable. This could mean talking in a quiet place, or it could mean doing an activity together. Remember, the time may never feel perfect, but try and avoid conversations at the height of distress.

Think about what you want to say - sometimes it is helpful to plan ahead what you want to say. Some parents find it helpful to practise in their head what they want to say or write things down.

Be patient - remember it can be difficult for children to collate their thoughts and find the right words to express themselves, particularly if they are feeling distressed or upset.

Try not feel disheartened at your first attempt - it can sometimes take time for children to open up, therefore they might not respond well the first time, or they might not open up at all. You can try again at a different time when they're more ready.

Remain calm - it can be difficult to hear that your child is struggling, try and remain calm and manage your own emotions to encourage your child to communicate freely and be open and honest.

Give them the space they need - pressuring your child to talk can adversely push your child away. It's important to respect their boundaries - there are some things they might not want to share or talk about with you. It is important to remind your child that you are there for them.

Be non-judgemental - it is important to try and set aside pre-conceived judgements about a situation, try to avoid expressing those judgements.



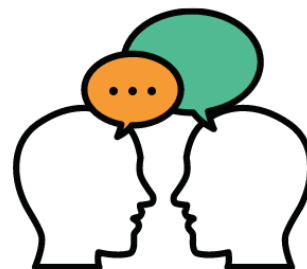
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The simple act of asking twice, with interest, can really help your child open up for the first time.

Supporting Conversations

If talking face-to-face is difficult for your child, you could:

- Talk on the phone
- Video call
- Write letters
- Send texts
- Draw



For some children, taking part in an enjoyable twenty-minute activity together can help them feel relaxed and help get the conversation started. Some activity ideas include:



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Conversation Starters...

Here's some conversation ideas to start things off...

"how are you feeling?"

"I have noticed you been feeling ____ lately, do you want to talk about it?"

"Do you want to talk about what has been going on?"

"What has been the biggest challenge you've had today?"

"what has been your your mind recently?"

"Can I help you with anything? Space, time to talk, a chance to do something fun together?"

"You've not seemed yourself in the past couple of weeks. Is there anything you want to talk about?"

"I feel you've been differently recently. I know you might feel like you can't talk to me, but I can help you find people you can contact if you want to talk about ____."



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Offer Encouragement

It is important to remember that you are an expert when it comes to your child. You will be able to tell if they aren't in the mood to talk, or when they aren't responding to your attempts.

It is important to reassure them that if they don't want to talk now, they can talk to you another time. It is also a good idea to follow up any conversation with encouragers.

"I'm here for you"

"I love you and nothing will ever change that"

"You can talk to me whenever you want"

"I want to best for you, I will do my best to help you"

"We will get through this together"

"If you want to talk to someone else, that's okay too"



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Responding to Conversations

If your child shares with you that they're struggling, it is important that they are made to feel comfortable, seen and heard.

When listening and responding, it helps to...

Give your full attention – try to ensure that you are not distracted by stopping any household tasks you are doing and silencing your phone. It is okay to do an activity with your child whilst they speak, as long as you're doing it together.

Validate their feelings - it is important to let your child know that their feelings are okay. You could say things like 'it's understandable that you're feeling...' or 'things do sound really difficult for you at the moment'.

Be patient – pauses are okay, you shouldn't feel like you have to talk when they're silent.

Show you're listening – after your child tells you something, repeating it back can help you check you understand what they mean. It also helps to show them that you're listening.

Be non-judgemental – show that you're open to the conversation through relaxing your body and using positive body language. Try to uncross your arms and sit at the same level as them.

Take a break – it can be difficult to talk about emotions, you can pause to take a break. You might both need some time to reflect, but could pick up the conversation again later.

Be thankful – thank them for sharing their difficulties and for being brave in opening up.

Ask – ask your child if there's anything you can do that would be particularly helpful at this given moment.

Remind – remind your child that these feelings are temporary, and things can change and they can begin to feel better.

Reassure – let your child know that you love them and that you're there for them. Tell your child that they can speak to you whenever they want, and you can help them find the best support.

