

# Starting the conversation

## Why it's important

We believe talking about mental health can help you and those around you to be happier and healthier. Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) England is calling on schools to 'Take 10 Together'— for staff members to have a 10 minute conversation with a pupil or student about their mental health.

Mental health and emotional issues often develop during adolescence. Social media, academic pressure, bullying, family units breaking down and an increased number of children in the care system have all been suggested as contributing factors to the rise in mental health issues in younger people.

Schools have the opportunity to take an active role in guiding a young person towards the appropriate support for recovery. The statistics below underline why it is so crucial for schools to pay attention to mental health.



# 1 IN 10

children and young people experience a mental health issue at any one time



IN THE PAST YEAR  
**ALMOST**

# 20,000

young people contacted Childline with suicidal thoughts – that's more than double the number five years ago

## In an average class of 30 15-year-olds:

10

Ten are likely to have watched their parents separate

6

Six may be self-harming

7

Seven are likely to have been bullied

1

One could have experienced the death of a parent



Youth Mental Health First Aid teaches people the skills and confidence to recognise the signs and symptoms of common mental health issues and effectively guide a young person towards the right support.

**Having a 10 minute chat is the first step on that journey.**

We don't often talk about our mental health so it might seem a little daunting to start a conversation about it but it's 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 and then signposting them to appropriate support.

# MHFA England has put together some ideas for how you can start the conversation



## Creating a safe space



Give yourself plenty of time so you don't appear to be in a hurry. 10 minutes may be enough but if you need longer then go ahead



Meet outside the classroom in a neutral space such as a quiet room or pastoral room



Sit down even if the other person is standing—it will make you seem less intimidating. Make it clear that they are not in trouble



## How to ask the questions



Keep your body language open and non-confrontational



Be empathetic and take them seriously



Do not offer glib advice such as "pull yourself together" or "cheer up"



Take into account cultural differences in communication styles e.g. how much eye contact is appropriate



Keep the chat positive and supportive, exploring the issues and how you may be able to help



## Useful questions to ask

How are you feeling at the moment?

How long have you felt like this – is it an ongoing issue?

Who do you feel you can go to for support?

Are there any factors outside of the classroom which are contributing to how you are feeling?

How can I help you?

What kind of support do you think might help you?



## How to listen

### Don't make a moral judgement

Be genuine — show that you accept the person and their values by what you say and do.

- Give the student your full focus and listen without interrupting
- Listen to their words, tone of voice and body language — all will give clues 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.

### Get on their wavelength

Place yourself in the student's shoes and demonstrate to them that you hear and understand what they are saying and feeling.



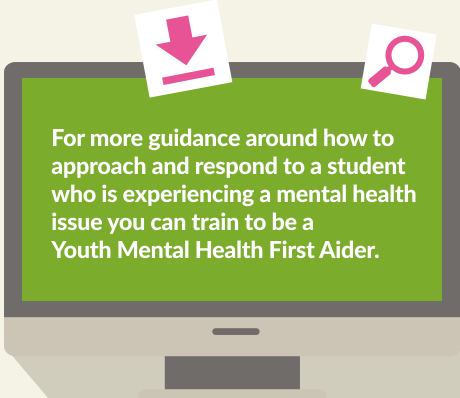
## What happens next?



Keep the conversation going — follow up and ask them how they are doing. Reassure them that your door is always open, and really mean it.



Give reassurance that there are lots of sources of support and some of these might be available via through a school counselling service, by visiting their GP or talking to the school nurse.



For more guidance around how to approach and respond to a student who is experiencing a mental health issue you can train to be a Youth Mental Health First Aider.



To learn more about how schools and parents can support the mental wellbeing of their young people, visit [mhfaengland.org](http://mhfaengland.org)

Find us on Twitter [@MHFAEngland](https://twitter.com/MHFAEngland)  
and on Facebook [facebook.com/MHFAEngland](https://facebook.com/MHFAEngland)

