SAMH

for Scotland's mental health

# STARTING THE MENTAL HEALTH CONVERSATION

A SAMH guide for parents and carers

# We all have mental health, and young people are no different.

The pressures of growing up can be a difficult and confusing time, and being able to talk openly about their mental wellbeing will ensure that they're better equipped to cope as adults.

This booklet is designed to help you start your conversation.

## WHEN'S A GOOD TIME AND PLACE FOR THEM?

For some young people, setting aside time to talk is comforting; for others, they might feel like they're in the spotlight.

You know what's best for them – whether it's going for a walk together to give them the space they need, or having a cup of tea and chat at home.

Pick a time they're likely to be relaxed but alert – some teenagers aren't great in the morning.

If they don't want to talk or aren't ready, give them space and agree a way to let you know when they are – such as – leaving a note or sending a text.

## WHAT'S THE EASIEST WAY FOR THEM TO COMMUNICATE?

Talking about feelings can be hard at the best of times.

In some cases, it might be just too difficult, and you might want to explore other options with them, like writing it down or even chatting by email.

It might be easier for them to talk to someone else. Let them know that this is ok, but that you need to know that they're safe. Ask them if they'd be comfortable with the person they do speak to letting you know this.

## HOW CAN YOU HELP THEM MAKE SENSE OF WHAT THEY'RE FEELING?

Sometimes young people have experiences that they find difficult to understand or make sense of. Because of this, it can be difficult for them to realise how their feelings and behaviours are related, and things can get jumbled up.

Encourage them to start at the beginning and talk you through it bit by bit. Prompt by asking how certain things made them feel or think so that you can get a full picture.

You might notice that some of this makes them feel guilty or ashamed. Try to empathise, and it could help to share a story of when you'd done or felt similar. These emotions are hard for a young person to deal with, but it's important to explore how to cope with them.

## HOW CAN YOU GET THE MOST OUT OF LISTENING?

The key to helping a child or young person to work through something that's bothering them – and build their confidence to do so in the future – is by actively listening to them.

Set your mind to explore what's happened, consider the options, and come up with a plan for what to do next.

Our instinct is often to fix things for our child, but sometimes it's better to help them to build confidence in their own ability to find a solution.

If you find yourself doing all the talking, take a step back.

## WHAT DO THEY NEED FROM ME?

Offloading their worries and getting a hug is often enough. Other times they'll need your help and advice to make a plan for what to do next.

If you're unsure how you can help, try asking.

# USEFUL CONTACTS:

### SAMH (SCOTTISH ASSOCIATION FOR MENTAL HEALTH)

t: 0141 530 1000
e: enquire@samh.org.uk
w: samh.org.uk
Details of local SAMH services and information and sign-posting for people concerned about mental health. Office hours 9am – 5pm, Monday to Friday.

### NSPCC HELPLINE

t: 0808 800 5000
e: help@nspcc.org.uk
w: nspcc.org.uk
Provides 24/7 help and support from trained helpline counsellors to thousands of parents, professionals and families.

### HANDS ON SCOTLAND

w: handsonscotland.co.uk
This website gives practical information, tools and activities to respond helpfully to troubling behaviour and to help children and young people to flourish.

### MINDED

w: minded.org.uk/families
Online advice and support for parents of children who may be experiencing poor mental health.

### PLACE2BE

e: Scotland@place2be.org.uk
w: place2be.org.uk
Providing emotional and therapeutic services in primary and secondary schools, building children's resilience through talking, creative work and play.

### YOUNGMINDS

t: 0808 802 5544 (Monday to Friday, 9.30am – 4pm)
w: youngminds.org.uk
Information and resources for young people and parents on mental health.

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