Tips for Talking About Your Mental Health

If you have concerns about your mental health, or are experiencing new emotions, it can be hard to talk about them out-loud with adults. You may feel scared to open up and worry about how they might react. It's natural to be nervous when you're talking about personal things like mental health, but having these feelings does not have to stop you from sharing how you feel. It's important to remember the benefits of talking openly with a trusted adult. They may give you ideas about how to cope or connect you with someone who can. Talking with an adult can also remind you that you're not alone and you can face these experiences together.

If you are unsure where to start, or can't find the right words to say, try using our Mental Health Conversation Checklist:

- ☐ Describe your thoughts, emotions, and behavior
- ☐ Pick a trusted adult
- ☐ Decide what you want from the talk
- ☐ Plan the time and place
- ☐ Practice the words and write down your questions

1. **Describe your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.** You may notice specific positive or negative changes about yourself recently. Write down words that describe any changes in how you've been thinking, feeling, and acting.

2. **Pick a trusted adult.** This is someone that you can depend on, you feel safe with, and you trust. The trusted adult will also be a person that you feel is knowledgeable, accepting, nonjudgmental, and validates your feelings. Examples are your parent or family member, a friend's parent, teacher, coach, school counselor, a church leader, or a doctor.

3. **Decide what you want from the talk.** Knowing what would help you most and expressing what you need is one way to start the conversation. Ask yourself, "What type of support or information do I want?" There are many types of support, from simply listening to concerns without giving advice, to actively helping by offering caring words or ideas. You may also seek information from the adult about the emotions you're experiencing, ways to cope, or next steps.

4. **Plan the time and place.** Timing and location are important when starting these conversations. Pick a time and place that the adult is available to give their full attention and provide a safe environment to share personal information. Going for a walk outside or talking after dinner are two options.

5. **Practice the words and write down your questions.** For some people, practicing what to say can make them feel more comfortable. It is helpful to use words that clearly express your feelings and needs. Using the Mental Health Conversation Checklist, write down your thoughts so you can practice and remember the key points before the talk.

If you need support, call our 24/7 Kids & Teens Helpline at **904.202.7900** or text **LIFE** to **741741**. If there is an immediate safety concern, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.

Wolfson Children's

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Mental Health Conversation Checklist

☐ Describe your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors:

I have been thinking

I have been feeling

I have been acting

☐ Pick a trusted adult:

Name and relationship to adult

☐ Decide what you want from the talk:

What type of support or information do I want?

☐ Plan the time and place:

Date/Time _____ Location _____

☐ Practice the words and write down your questions:

"_____, I need to talk to you about something that's been bothering me."
"_____, I need to talk to you, but I'm worried what you'll say."
"_____, something exciting happened today and I wanted to share it with you."
"_____, can you give me some ideas about how to get more involved at school?"
"_____, I have a lot going on right now, can we talk?"
"_____, I want to spend more time with friends. How can I do that?"

Other words to start the conversation

Questions for the adult:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Talking About Your Mental Health Concerns at the Doctor

Starting a conversation or answering questions about your mental health at the doctor can be uncomfortable. If this is something you experience, use the Doctor Conversation Starters guide to help. Print this a day or two before your appointment with the doctor so you have time to complete it. Bring the guide to the visit and use it to start the conversation about how you're feeling.

Doctor Conversation Starters

SYMPTOMS	KEY POINTS
EMOTION	*List and describe any changes in your mood, like feelings of sadness, hopelessness, emptiness, worry, or anger.* **My Emotions:** *(Example: "I've been feeling down and don't enjoy anything anymore.")* In your own words:
THOUGHT	*List and describe any changes in your thinking, like trouble concentrating, worrying too much, or having thoughts of hurting yourself or others.* **My Thoughts:** *(Example: "I can't focus and I'm always worrying something bad will happen.")* In your own words:
BEHAVIOR	*List and describe any changes in your daily activities, like isolating yourself from friends/family, sleeping too much, or self-harming.* **My Behavior:** *(Example: "I've been staying in my room more and sleep all day.")* In your own words:
PHYSICAL	*List and describe any changes in your body, like not feeling as hungry, getting headaches, feeling nauseous, tired, or in-pain.* **My Body:** *(Example: "My head's been hurting and I don't feel like eating.")* In your own words: