

CONVERSATION STARTERS

YOUNGMINDS

A guide for parents and carers

Starting a conversation with your child isn't always easy. You might feel unsure about how to begin or how to keep things going. To support you, we've put together lots of questions and phrases to help you feel more confident getting started.

As you navigate these conversations, remember that it's normal for your child to take time opening up. Try not to put pressure on them to share everything. And don't feel like you have to get it right every time. Instead, focus on listening and making space for talking as part of everyday life. Make sure you lean on the people you trust too. Talking things through with them can give you the headspace and support you need to be there for your child.

Starting the conversation

Start with some general questions to help you both ease into it:

- ✱ What did you get up to today?
- ✱ How did [a subject they did at school today] go?
- ✱ Did you watch the next episode of...yet?
- ✱ How's [a hobby/interest/project they're enjoying] going?
- ✱ What happened at the end of that [book/TV episode/film]?
- ✱ What kind of thing do you feel like doing [this weekend/over the school holiday]?
- ✱ What was the best bit of your day?
- ✱ What was the worst bit of your day?



How your child will feel: They're interested in the things I like/don't like. I know how to answer these questions.

Move the conversation on by gently checking in:

- ✱ It's been a while since we talked about...how's that going at the moment?
- ✱ I've noticed that you've seemed a bit...lately. Is everything okay?
- ✱ I've wondered if...is feeling hard for you at the moment?
- ✱ I've been wondering if something's getting you down?
- ✱ How's [a subject they're struggling with/a teacher they don't like/a friend they've had an argument with/a hobby they've been finding difficult] going?
- ✱ How are you feeling about...?



How your child will feel: They care about the things going on in my life. I feel noticed. I might not be able to answer the question right now, but I've heard it.

Encouraging them to say more

If your child starts talking, there are things you can say to keep the conversation going. When they pause, it's okay to leave a short silence to see if they've got more to say. Then, gently prompt them to continue.

Sometimes, simply reflecting back what they've just said is enough to encourage them. It might go like:

- ✱ Parent: So she told you off and then you were like, that's not fair!
- ✱ Child: Yeah and then ...



How your child will feel: They want to listen to me. They're interested in my point of view. It's so good to be heard and understood.

To help you understand a bit more, you can also ask questions like:

- ✱ So she/he/they said...And then what?
- ✱ So what happened is...Have I got that right?
- ✱ It sounds as if you're feeling...Have I got that right?
- ✱ What I've heard is...
- ✱ I wonder if it's...?
- ✱ Is it like...?
- ✱ Can you help me understand more about...?
- ✱ Can you tell me a bit more about...?
- ✱ What's that like for you?
- ✱ What do you think about that?

Responding to what they tell you

If they do share something, it's really important to show you believe them. Make sure you listen and empathise before thinking about any solutions. The goal is to make them feel heard and understood, not to fix it straightaway.

You can say:

- ✳ I'm not surprised you're feeling...
- ✳ No wonder you're feeling so...
- ✳ It's totally understandable to feel...
- ✳ How could you not be feeling...
- ✳ It's so sad/frustrating/hard when...
- ✳ How unfair/confusing/hurtful
- ✳ I'm so sorry it's been like that for you
- ✳ I'm so glad you've told me



How your child will feel: I feel less alone and less overwhelmed. They get me. I'm not wrong for feeling like this.

Exploring the problem

It can help to think together about what's going on and what might make it better. But they might not be ready to do this straightaway. Sometimes they'll just need you to listen or distract them when they're struggling. When they do feel ready to think it through, making a 'mind map' together can be a good way to reflect on different parts of their life. They can start by drawing themselves in the middle or writing their name. Around this, they can list the things that are bothering them. These might be at home, at school, online, with friends or family, or with a hobby they do.

After this, you can ask:

- ✳ What part feels the hardest right now?
- ✳ What would you like to be different?
- ✳ What do you wish you could change?
- ✳ Can I help you find a first step towards that change?
- ✳ Have you got any ideas of what you'd like to do?
- ✳ How can I help?



How your child will feel: I understand how I'm feeling more. I can manage this. I can ask for help if I need it.

Providing hope and reassurance

When children and young people are going through a hard time, it can feel like things will always be this way. Avoid coming up with quick solutions to complicated problems. But do show that you're confident these feelings won't last forever and things can get better.

You can say:

- ✳ We might not have all the answers right now, but there's always a way through
- ✳ We can take steps towards changing this together
- ✳ It won't feel this bad forever
- ✳ You're not on your own with this
- ✳ I love you and I'm here whenever you need to talk



How your child will feel: Things can get better. I don't have to face my problems alone.