

December 2024 Mental health and wellbeing newsletter

Christmas can sometimes be a challenging time for families and young people for several reasons. Below are some tips and guidance with ideas of how to support children's mental health and get them talking.

It's good to talk

"The teenage years are both exciting and challenging to parents and children. Children start to see a future independent of their parents while parents have to find new ways of protecting a young person who may choose to turn to peers rather than parents for support.

This period can be a confusing and testing time which can be hard for parents. Most young people navigate their way through adolescence. However, for a small number of children problems can become persistent and can threaten the connection between parent and child. Talking early on, before problems become too ingrained, almost always helps.



Sometimes we stop talking because we don't know what to say. We hope this leaflet may help. Of course, we all know that it's not always possible to talk, but it is always good to make the offer. Sometimes supportive friends or a trusted adult – perhaps a teacher – can help. Professionals are there, but even if their help is required, it is still good to talk."

Professor Peter Fonagy, CEO of the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families

Mental health and wellbeing during secondary school

As parents and carers, it can be hard to know whether your child's feelings and behaviour are normal or becoming a problem. This is especially during adolescence when young people can feel a great deal of pressure and increasingly want to loosen their family ties.



Young people's need for independence is partly due to changes in brain development. This makes reading and understanding others more difficult than when they were younger. This can leave parents feeling that young people are in a world of their own, when actually they can be struggling to understand themselves and others!

A rollercoaster of changing emotions and feelings that come and go is completely normal at this age. Feelings and moods that become a problem are those which last a long time, become overwhelming, and stop your child from doing what they want to in their lives.

December 2024 Mental health and wellbeing newsletter

Top tips for talking

★ **Give your full attention, be curious and take it seriously.** We all know it's not nice to be half listened to. Being actively interested in your child can be a powerful way to help them feel listened to and understood. Try to resist the urge to downplay or dismiss what your child is telling you.

★ **Emphasise that you are always available to talk.** It may be that your child doesn't want to talk, can't find the words at the moment or is trying to assert their independence. But don't be misled by your teenager's need for separation. They need you just as much as ever.



★ **Take time to reflect.** Research shows that thinking about what is going on in your child's mind and being aware of your own thoughts and feelings promotes secure attachment, good social skills and the ability to 'read' others.

★ **Provide empathy.** When children feel truly understood they start to be able to manage their emotions and this has a big impact on their wellbeing. Using empathy is also a great way to defuse tension.

★ **Be aware of your own stress and negative feelings.** They can really get in the way of feeling close to your child. Reflecting on the causes of stress can prevent it from spilling into your relationships at home.

★ **Think about timing.** Ask yourself 'Is this the right time to talk?' Choose a time when you can focus on your child and ignore distractions.

December 2024 Mental health and wellbeing newsletter

Where can I find advice and guidance?

Child in Mind: a series of podcasts we have developed at the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families. They feature BBC Radio 4 presenter Claudia Hammond interviewing our clinical experts, and have been shortlisted for the Mind Media Awards. They are freely available at www.annafreud.org:

- The adolescent mind
- What is therapy and how does it work?
- Why do some people self-harm?
- What is trauma and how does it affect the brain?
- Is medication for mental health problems safe?
- The impact of sexual material online
- What do we know about anxiety and what can parents do about it?
- What is ADHD and what help is available for children with ADHD?
- What do we know about eating disorders and how to cope?



ChildLine for 18s and under
0800 1111

Youth Wellbeing Directory
youthwellbeing.co.uk

Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families
www.annafreud.org

YoungMinds Parent Helpline
0808 802 5544

NSPCC 0808 800 5000

The Mix www.themix.org.uk

MindEd for Families
www.minded.org.uk/families

Email contact in school – sharpr@brookfield56.lancs.sch.uk Please feel free to email for advice on where to find more resources to support your child's wellbeing or with any concerns you have.