

How to talk to students about mental health

By approaching the topic of mental health with empathy, understanding, and openness, teachers can create a supportive environment where students feel comfortable seeking help and supporting each other. Here are some tips and talking points:

What to do

- Express concern and listen first
- Create a safe and supportive environment
- Reassure and validate their feelings
- Normalize mental health conversations
- Help them identify triggers or cause of stress
- Encourage them to relax – go for a walk together, do some breathing exercises, listen to music, or practice grounding exercises
- Respect privacy
- Follow up
- Encourage them to seek help (Text **SCHOOL** to **741741** and connect with a live volunteer counselor)

What not to do

- Take over the conversation
- Force confrontation
- Share your own personal story about a similar feeling or situation
- Pressure students to share where they might not feel comfortable
- Get frustrated or angry with the student who is going through a difficult moment
- Generalize what the student is going through
- Expect immediate change in their behavior while they're experiencing stress or anxiousness
- Suggest solutions if you're not well-informed about their situation

How to get started

- Open up the conversation by asking open-ended questions – you could ask, “What does mental health mean to you?” or “How do you cope with stress?”
- Instead of saying “Stop overthinking” or “Be present” try saying “I can tell you're having a hard time” or “I'm here to help you get through this”
- Instead of saying “Calm down” or “It's all in your head” try validating their feelings by saying “I'm here for you” or “I'm here to listen if you want to talk” or “I'll stay with you if you'd like”