

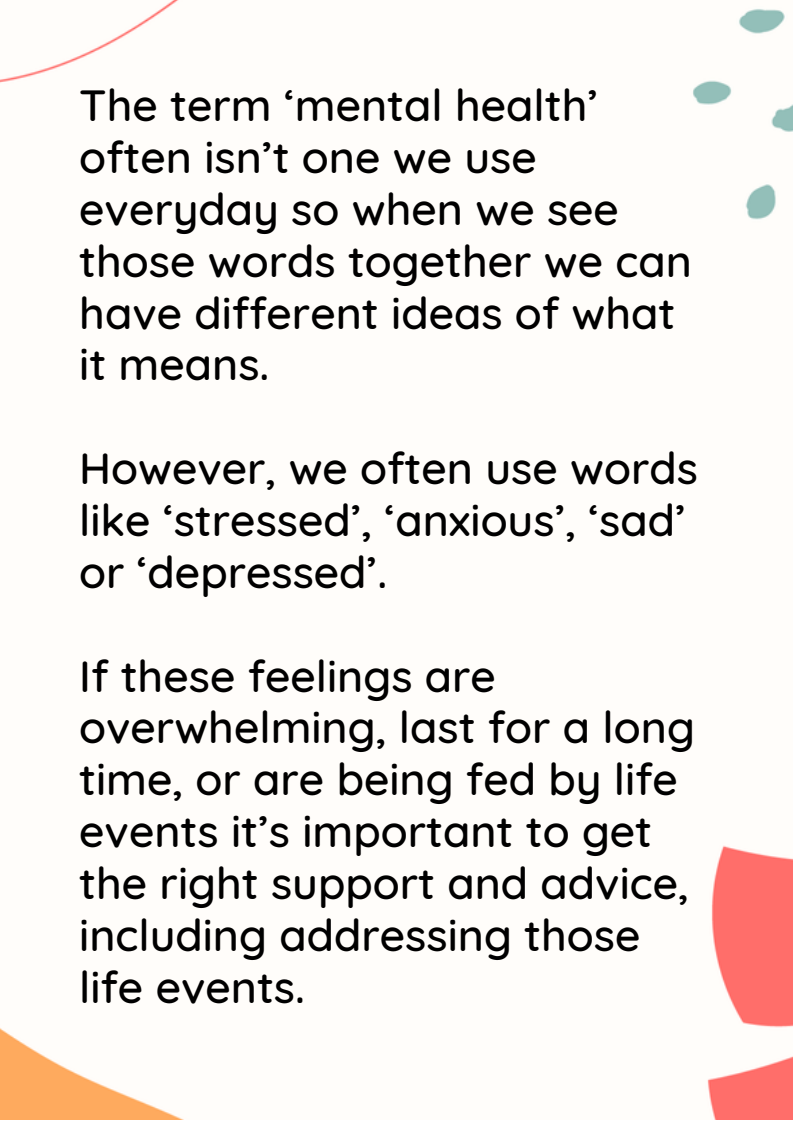
# How to Talk to Children About Mental Health



Talking to children from an early age about mental health can set up healthy habits and equip them with the skills and tools to look after their wellbeing.



It also helps them to feel more comfortable entering into conversations about their emotions.



The term 'mental health' often isn't one we use everyday so when we see those words together we can have different ideas of what it means.

However, we often use words like 'stressed', 'anxious', 'sad' or 'depressed'.

If these feelings are overwhelming, last for a long time, or are being fed by life events it's important to get the right support and advice, including addressing those life events.

# Stress

Stress is tension that builds up in the body and mind in response to something happening in our lives.



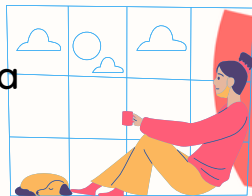
# Anxiety

Anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear that can be mild or severe.

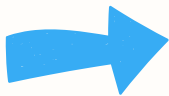


# Depression

Depression is a low mood that can last for a long time and can be either mild or severe.

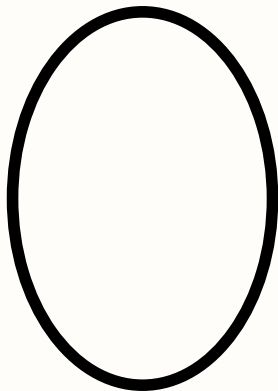


# Feelings Mask



On one side of the face write down or draw the emotions you show others on the outside.

On the other side of the face write or draw the emotions you feel on the inside.



Is there a difference in the emotions you display and this you hide in different situations? Or are there certain emotions you're not comfortable expressing? Why is this?



How are  
you?



I'm fine

We often ask 'how are you?' but we rarely answer honestly, mostly responding with a polite 'I'm fine'.

Children pick up from an early age and it just becomes habit that can stop a conversation before it begins.

Talk to the child and make a pledge to answer honestly and discuss ways to challenge the statement 'I'm fine'.

# How to have a good conversation about mental health

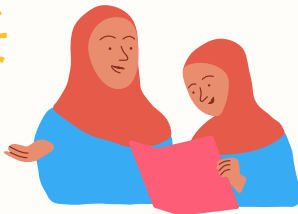
Try to start a conversation while engaging in another activity such as going for a walk or playing a game, as it can ease the conversation along.

Be sure that the conversation is taking place in a comfortable, safe and private environment.



# Show you are listening

- Maintain eye contact
- Nodding in encouragement
- 'I'm sorry to hear that'
- Try not to impose your own experiences
- Try not to jump to solutions or panic, just give them the space to talk
- Let them know you are there to help





## At the end of the conversation you could...

- Thank them for having the conversation with you and opening up about their feelings
- Remind them you are there if they need to talk again
- Talk about what they can do to make themselves feel better
- Ask them how they feel after having talked about their problems

# Top Tips

- **Keep it simple.** You don't need to overcomplicate things, just ask simple questions about how your child is feeling and the events in their life (e.g. school, friends, sleep, stress)
- **Talk regularly.** Having this kind of conversation regularly can help it feel more natural. This supports your child in setting up healthy habits to regularly check in with their own mental health.
- **Be Honest.** Answer your child's questions about mental health with honesty
- **Talk support networks.** Discuss the people your child would feel comfortable talking to if they felt sad or worried.

# Keeping an eye on children's mental health

- Look for changes in their behaviours. Has their mood changed recently, have they become more withdrawn or angry?
- Are they seeing their friends as often as they usually do?
- How do they play? Children express themselves in the way they play which can indicate how they are feeling.
- Are they engaged in the activities they normally enjoy?

# Get support

Young Minds [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

Place2be [www.place2be.org.uk](http://www.place2be.org.uk)

Child Bereavement  
[www.childbereavementuk.org](http://www.childbereavementuk.org)

The Mix [www.themix.org.uk/mental-health](http://www.themix.org.uk/mental-health)

SEND and You Bristol [www.sendandyou.org.uk](http://www.sendandyou.org.uk)

Single Parent Action Network Bristol  
[www.singleparents.org.uk](http://www.singleparents.org.uk)

NHS Bristol Directory of Support  
<https://bnssg.icb.nhs.uk/health-and-care/health-advice-and-support/children-and-young-peoples-emotional-health-and-wellbeing/>



Produced by CASS, Nov 2022 a pioneering programme that ran from 2016 to 2023 and worked with community, equality and faith groups to improve knowledge, confidence, and awareness of mental health