

# Looking out for your friends

Good Thinking's quick guide to help children and young people support friends who may be struggling with their mental health.



Being kind and looking out for others is an important part of being a good friend. So, the team here at [Good Thinking](https://www.good-thinking.uk), London's digital mental wellbeing service, has created this short guide to help you do this. The more open everyone can be about their feelings, the better.

## STEP 1

# Spot the signs



From exams to social media, bullying to money worries, lots of things can affect your mental health and make you feel stressed, anxious or unhappy.

It can be difficult to know if a friend is struggling with their mental health, especially if they don't want to talk about it, but there are a few things you can look out for – you may notice a combination of these things or spot a pattern over a period of time.

Do they seem...



Sad?



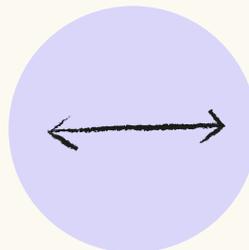
Worried?



Overwhelmed?



Irritable?



Distant?



Excitable?



Tired?



On edge?

## STEP 1

# Spot the signs



Are they...



Hurting themselves on purpose?



Experiencing physical symptoms regularly (e.g. headaches and tummy aches)?



Struggling to concentrate?



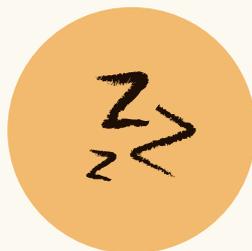
Behaving differently on social media?



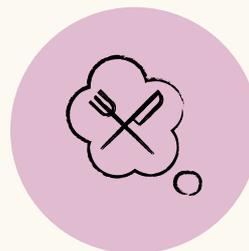
Not wanting to be around people?



Talking about drinking alcohol, using drugs or smoking?



Sleeping more or less than usual?



Eating more or less than usual?

Remember that it's important to look after yourself too. If supporting your friend is affecting your own wellbeing, it's ok to take a step back and talk to a trusted adult.

## STEP 2

# Check in and let them know you care



It's not always possible to spot the signs so it's really important to check how your friends are feeling and to create a safe and supportive space for them to open up.

Here are some tips and ideas for starting a conversation with a friend to see how they are feeling.



### Starting the conversation

- **Timing is everything.**

Think about whether this is a good moment to start this conversation.

*Hey, do you have time for a catch-up?*

- **Try to find a quiet space.**

Have a private conversation with your friend, away from distractions.

*Shall we find somewhere quiet to chat?*

- **It's difficult to know where to begin.**

Asking about how they've been can be helpful.

*How have you been doing?*

- **Start the conversation.**

You can show that you've seen a change in their usual behaviour.

*I've noticed that you haven't seemed yourself lately, is there anything you want to talk about?*

## STEP 2

# Check in and let them know you care



### Having the conversation

- **Listening is key.**

You won't always have the answers but you can show someone you care by just letting them know that they have been heard.

*You mentioned [example], how did you feel about that?*

- **Show your friend that you are grateful for them opening up to you.**

Sometimes these conversations can be emotional and exhausting so it might be helpful to think about how you can both wind down.

*I really appreciated you talking to me about this.*

### Closing the conversation

- **You don't need to have all the answers.**

We often want to help fix things but your friend might only want to air the problem and not expect you to offer a solution. You can reassure them that you are there for them. It's just as important that you behave the way you always have – call, text, hang out and have fun together.

*It's been good to catch up. I'm here when you need someone to talk to.*

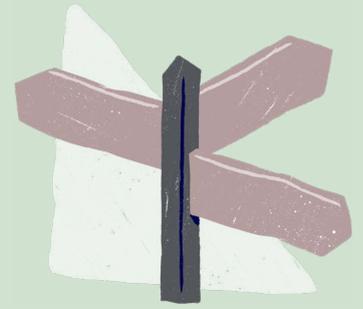
- **You and your friend aren't alone.**

There are organisations and resources out there to provide confidential support. If you think the problem is serious, you may wish to ask an adult for advice or contact one of the charities and organisations listed on page 7.

*Now, that you have told me [example], what would you like to do?*

## STEP 3

# Help them get the support they need



If your friend chooses to confide in you, the most important thing you can do is show them that you care for them and want to help. Remember, it's not your responsibility alone to help them.

[Good Thinking](#) has a great range of advice, tools and support which are free and available 24/7 – for example, you could:

- Encourage them to try one of [Good Thinking's free NHS-approved apps](#) to help with lowering stress and anxiety, improving sleep and boosting mood. These include:
- Download the free [Combined Minds app](#) to help you understand common mental health conditions and learn how you can support your friend.



An app for 11 to 19-year-olds to help manage symptoms of anxiety.



Feeling Good Teens is a programme of audio tracks for 10 to 15-year-olds to help develop self-esteem, mental resilience and motivation.

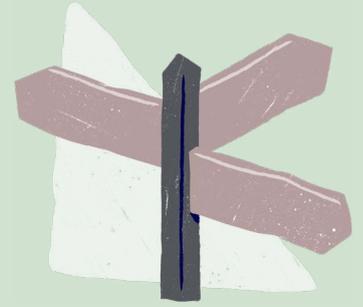
- If your friend has lost a loved one, share Good Thinking's [bereavement advice with them](#).
- Explore Good Thinking's [library of expert advice for young people](#) where you'll find short guides with tips and resource recommendations to help with a range of concerns, including dealing with bullying, eating disorders and anger.
- Suggest doing some of the activities on our [Five ways to good mental wellbeing](#) posters together.



Designed by a teenage mental health charity to help families and friends support young people with their mental wellbeing.

## STEP 3

# Help them get the support they need



If you're concerned that your friend might be in danger of hurting themselves or others, speak to an adult you can trust, such as a teacher or a family member. Your friend may not want anyone else to know, but it's important to put their safety first and ensure they get the help they need.

If they have asked you not to tell anyone and you need someone to talk to, try contacting a mental health charity via a phone or text helpline or a forum. You might also want to encourage your friend to look at some of these other online support services:

Provides young people with tools to look after their mental health.

**Text YM to 85258**

Supports positive mental health in teenagers with mental health information, apps and education.

**Visit [www.stem4.org.uk](http://www.stem4.org.uk)**

Free, confidential support for young people under 25 via online, social and mobile.

**Call 0808 808 4994**  
**Text THEMIX to 85258**

Confidential support and advice for young people struggling with thoughts of suicide, and anyone worried about a young person.

**Call 0800 068 41 41**  
**Text 07860 039967**

**shout**  
**85258**

here for you 24/7

Shout offers free, confidential, 24/7 crisis text support.

**Text SHOUT to 85258**

Free mental health crisis helpline available 24/7, 365 days a year.

**Call 116 123**  
**Email [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)**

# Urgent support and professional help

If your support doesn't seem to be having much impact and changes in your friend's emotions and behaviour start to affect how they live, don't worry – it's not your fault.

Sometimes people need professional support so perhaps you could help them to:

- Talk to an adult that they trust.
- Make an appointment with their GP.
- Contact a mental health charity via a phone (e.g. [Mind](#) or [Samaritans](#)) or text helpline (e.g. text YM to 85258) or online forum.
- If your friend is very distressed, call their [local 24/7 NHS mental health helpline](#).

Visit [Good Thinking's Urgent Support page](#) for details of urgent support services and helplines available 24/7.

This guide has been developed by Good Thinking in partnership with:



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Partnership  
for Young  
London