

Changes in your child's mood and behaviour are normal part of growing up.

While you know your child better than anyone, sometimes it can also be hard to know the difference between normal behaviour and potential mental health concerns. No one expects you to be an expert in mental health but there things you can do to support your child.

Notice changes

There might be changes in your child's emotions, behaviour and thinking that indicate they might need some extra help. You might notice:

- Feelings of fear, anxiety and sadness and/or angry outbursts
- Withdrawal from friends, family and activities and/or being low in energy
- Difficulty going to sleep and/or changes in appetite
- Trouble concentrating
- Negative thoughts that won't go away
- Other changes in behaviour – being more emotional or temper tantrums in younger children.

Headspace provides a comprehensive list of things you might notice about your child's mental health. For more information, see: [How to talk to your child about mental health](#).

Some other things to think about are:

- How long have the emotions and behaviour lasted? If it has been longer than two weeks, it might be time to seek help.
- How strong are the emotions? Are they there all the time or do they come and go?
- How much of an impact are the emotions and behaviour having on your child's schoolwork, physical health, relationships and enjoyment of everyday activities?

Talk to your child

It can be hard to talk about mental health. Sometimes we are worried it might be upsetting or we are worried we might make things worse.

There isn't a perfect way to start the conversation. What you say will depend on your child's age and their understanding. Try to use "I" statements like these:

- I've noticed that you seem to have a lot on your mind lately. I'm happy to talk or listen and see if I can help.
- It seems like you [haven't been yourself lately/ have been up and down], how are things?
- You seem [anxious/sad], what is happening for you? We can work it out together.
- It's ok if you don't want to talk to me, you could talk to [trusted/known adult]. I will keep letting you know I love you and am concerned.

If your child opens to you:

- reassure them everything will be okay and that you're glad they are talking to you
- acknowledge that talking about personal thoughts and feelings can be hard
- ask what they need from you (although they might not know what they need)
- offer to help them find information and support.

For more tips on talking to your child, see:

- **Raising Children Network:** [What can I say to start a conversation with my young person about their mental health?](#)
- **Safe Minds:** [Inquire tip sheet for families](#)
- **Reach Out:** [How to have a great conversation](#)



Get support

If you have concerns about your child's mental health, start by talking to your child's school. They can help you access a range of supports offered by the Department of Education and Training.

For you – Services, information and tools

There are also services, information and tools you can access to help you decide if your child needs more support.

Services

- [Parentline](#): 13 22 89 – an anonymous and confidential phone service for parents and carers of children from birth to 18 years old.
- [Lifeline](#): 13 11 14 – 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention strategies.
- [Beyond Blue](#): 1300 22 46 36 – confidential one on one counselling and tools and resources to look after your mental health.

Information

- The Department's [Mental Health Toolkit](#)
- Raising Children's [Mental health and wellbeing for children](#) (suitable for 0 - 8 years old) and [Mental health and wellbeing for teens](#)
- Headspace's [For friends and family](#) – includes information on how to support a family member, tips for a healthy headspace, understanding adolescence and how to start the conversation.
- [Reachout's Parent self-help content](#) – provides advice and resources to assist your child with mental health concerns, everyday issues, wellbeing, connecting and communicating.
- [Black Dog Institute](#) – self-tools and apps, advice on when and where to seek help, information on mental health conditions and support groups.

Tools

Beyond Blue's [Child mental health checklist](#) (suitable for 4 – 16 years old). This asks questions about how your child has been thinking, feeling and behaving. It can help you decide if your child needs professional support. The checklist is confidential.

For your child – Services and information

As well as support from your child's school and the family GP, there are a range of services that your child can access from home:

- [Free one-on-one counselling](#) – the Department's partnership with headspace allows Victorian Government secondary school students to access telephone counselling services.
- [Kids Helpline](#): 1800 551 800 – a free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25.
- [headspace](#): 1800 650 890 – professional online and phone mental health support services to young people aged 12 – 25 years old.
- [ReachOut](#) – an online mental health organisation for young people and their parents. This offers practical support, tools and tips to help young people get through anything from everyday issues to tough times.

In an emergency

If you think your child is in immediate danger, call 000 or take your child to the hospital emergency department.

