### Conversation Guide: Talking to your friend about mental health

#### Approaching a conversation

**Spotting the signs of poor mental health**

- Withdrawing from your friendship group
- Changes in mood and behaviour
- Becoming more aggressive towards others
- Not communicating the way they normally do
- Eating more, eating less or comfort eating

This is a good way to understand your friend's expectations. It also lets them know you are there to help and support. You could offer to help them get an appointment with their GP, speak with a trusted teacher at school or help them find support online and through helplines.

If you don't feel comfortable with something they are asking you to do, you can say that and tell them what you would be comfortable doing.

#### What you can do to support your friend?

**Ask your friend what they would like from you.**

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**Listen and give them your full attention**

**Offer reassurance** that you are there to listen. Try not to be distracted with other things, it's important that they know you are dedicating your full attention to them. Let them know they have done the right thing by speaking to you.

If you don't know what to say, remember that you don't need to find an answer, or even understand their feelings. Listening will let them know you care.

**Validate what they are saying**

It can be hard sometimes to get out what we want to say. It can help if we are told our experiences and feelings are valid and by doing this your friend will know they are not alone. You can tell them that it's ok to be feeling the way they are.

Don't make assumptions as this may make your friend feel more uncomfortable and do encourage them to take their time. Everyone has had times when they have struggled with their mental health.

**Normalise things** - it's good to remember that sometimes people can feel shy or embarrassed once they have had these conversations. So, it's important to continue doing things together, going to a café, a walk, shopping etc. This will help reassure them. Remember, just by being there for your friend, you are doing something great.

If you are worried about your friend, encourage them to speak to others – a trusted adult such as a teacher, a sports coach, or a youth worker. If you can, support them or if they are worried about doing this by going with them or being there when they make a phone call.

**Put some boundaries in place** – we can end up doing things that we don't feel comfortable with. By setting some boundaries you are communicating what is okay for you and what isn't. For example, if talking to your friend after school is better than during lunchtime, tell them. By protecting your mental health and wellbeing you will be in a better position to support your friend.

**Practising self-care and taking time for yourself** – taking time will allow you to think about what's going on and how best to process it. Do things that you enjoy and make you feel good, such as going for a walk, watching TV or writing and drawing which can help you relax and reflect.

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**The most important thing to remember is you don't have to do this alone - it's not all up to you.**

Reach out for support – if you feel like you are struggling, ask for help. Have a look at our signposting document.

**Looking after your resilience** can be really important, have a look at some of our resilience animations.