

## How to talk to children about mental health

Research has revealed that even youngsters are struggling with stress, loneliness and depression. Here's how you can help

The Economic Times · 14 Sep 2021 · 14 · — Daily Mirror

We are in the midst of a mental health crisis and even children have been affected. Many feel stress, loneliness and anxiety, and have considered suicide. Given that children lack the necessary tools to deal with a crisis like this, parents need to give them a helping hand. Paula Talman, founder of iSpace, a UK-based mental health and wellbeing curriculum for schools, and clinical psychologist Dr Nancy Nsiah have shared how to handle some common problems faced by children:



**I think my child is depressed. What can I do?**

**Young children** Set aside some time — at least 20 minutes every day — for a conversation. With young children, you can do this through play. Games like Lego or a storybook could help create a relaxed environment for a talk about emotions.  
**Teenagers** Let them know you've noticed that they don't seem happy, but in a caring and non-judgmental way. See if they can explain why. Let them know you are there for them. Explain how a daily routine helps — sleep, exercise, nutrition, hydration and time with friends.

**My child is being bullied at school. How can I stop this?** **Young children** It's important to listen and reassure them that you won't act without agreeing on a plan with them first.  
**Teenagers** Sit with your child and discuss the school's policy on bullying together. Keep a diary of this to share with the school. If they are being bullied online, keep screenshots as evidence and send them to the school. **Older children** often want to try to manage situation themselves, so be a sounding board for ideas. Ensure they spend time with supportive friends.

**My child doesn't want to talk to me. What can I do?**

**Young children** Questioning children about the things they find hard to verbalise can make them vulnerable. Instead, give them room to process their emotions. Do something you enjoy together and let the conversation flow naturally.  
**Teenagers** Teens can find it easier to rate how they are feeling rather than going into a full conversation. So, create a sliding scale from one to five, and ask them pertinent questions.

**My child seems lonely with no friends. How can I help them?**

**Young children** Ask them if they feel left out. Show an interest in what their friends have been up to and offer to create opportunities where they can meet, such as playdates. Listen

empathetically, validate their feelings and encourage them to find solutions.

Teenagers Some people can be alone and not lonely, while others can be surrounded by people and still experience loneliness. Check what your child is feeling. Volunteering work or team sports are ways to keep people connected.

My child is only interested in screens and computer games. Is this bad for their mental health?

Young children Reflect on your own screen use and make adjustments to model a more balanced relationship. Remember your child observes your behaviour and reacts accordingly. Offer alternate activities and create technology-free zones, such as around the dinner table. Teenagers Teens use social media to communicate and socialise with each other. Encourage them to arrange activities with family, friends and suggest things to do together as a