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8 WAYS TO HELP OUR KIDS OPEN UP

TO MARK CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH WEEK, EXPERTS TELL LISA SALMON HOW PARENTS CAN START CHATS WITH YOUNG ONES IF THEY'RE WORRIED

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GROWING up in the modern world isn't easy, and children may struggle with the pressures even more than adults.



The most recent NHS research found one in five young people aged eight to 25 were likely to have a mental health condition, a figure which rose between 2017-2023, most notably in the 17-19 age group.

On top of that, the number of children and young people referred to emergency mental healthcare rose by 10% between 2023 and 2024, with mental health charity YoungMinds stressing many of these young people were waiting for NHS support for months, or even years.

But how can parents talk to their children about how they're feeling, and take action to help them if necessary?

Speaking to mark Children's Mental Health Week (February 9-15), Dr Rebecca Kirkbride, clinical director of the children's mental health charity Place2Be, which organises the annual event, says it's important to speak to children at a time and place when they feel comfortable.

"It's going to be about the individual child, so I always suggest parents think about when their child feels most comfortable opening up and talking about things," she says.

"Most children don't like being interrogated and obviously it depends on their age, but you might find that if you're sitting watching telly together or playing a game together, that when you create that safe space, the conversation flows."

Stevie Goulding, services manager, parent and carers services at YoungMinds, says many young people are experiencing multiple pressures which impact their mental health, including schoolwork worries, relationship issues, and dealing with the online world and social media.

"They're also adapting to lots of changes as they grow up, which can cause them to express raw emotions and change moods quickly," she says.

"For parents, it can be hard to know when to be worried about your child's mental health. Talking to them about this subject can be hard, and they might struggle to open up to begin with."

■ Call the YoungMinds' parents' helpline on 0808 802 5544