

THE ROLE OF A CARING ADULT

Young people need a caring adult to reach out to for support in order to build **resilience** – the ability to adapt to difficult situations. Youth may face a range of difficult situations, ranging from stress related to social media use, to toxic stress from abuse or overwhelming adversity. Caring adults should focus on building upon youth's positive qualities and foster overall healthy development, rather than focus on deficits. This approach is

Important: The teenage brain is still developing making skills like managing strong emotions and controlling impulses more difficult. It is normal for teens to engage in risk-taking behavior and struggle with decision-making skills.

Quick Tips <

- Create an **environment of supportive and honest communication**. It's okay to let the young person know mental health is a hard thing to talk about – for both of you.
- Caring adults help young people develop skills of **planning, managing** their behavior and **adapting** to life circumstances.

BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP WITH A YOUNG PERSON

Trust is the most critical ingredient in building a relationship with a young person. Trust is built in both actions and words.

Caring adults need to be consistent in how frequently they communicate with a young person, follow through on their promises, and uphold personal boundaries. Adults can build trust by practicing active listening, being curious about topics important to the young person, and asking for feedback on how to be the best source of support. Adults can show care through their actions by reaching out (even if the young person does not reciprocate), offering opportunities that are challenging to them and push them outside their comfort zone, and role modeling conversations about sensitive topics, such as mental health.

Quick Tips <

- Be a role model by being **consistent** and **taking the lead** in reaching out to the young person.
- Do not be discouraged if a young person doesn't reach back out to a communication.
- If you have any **personal boundaries, express them to the young person** (e.g., not taking calls during work or after a certain time)

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

When checking in about a young person's mental health, caring adults should expect to be patient and have multiple conversations over time. You don't have to ask about mental health directly, but can use a question like "What is on your mind lately?" to approach the topic. It's always good practice to thank the young person for sharing with you and follow-up on what you've discussed in the near future.

Important: Do not promise confidentiality, because you may have to tell another adult if the young person is at risk or hurting themselves or others.

Quick Tips <

- Ensure to block off **plenty of time**, so the young person can talk for as long as they need.
- Mental health discussions often take place **over time** and **multiple conversations**. Have reasonable expectations when you initially raise the topic.
- Self-reflect on what topics you are **comfortable discussing**. For example, substance use, sex, or other sensitive topics.

WHAT TO NOTICE AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Getting to know a young person's typical behavior will help you know when their behavior changes in a major way. The following are examples of negative changes to your young person's mental health:

- Withdrawing from relationship
- Lack of interest in activities they used to enjoy
- Major changes in things like appetite, hygiene or sleep

Important: If they are having thoughts of harming themselves or others, take immediate action to get professional help. Support them in their treatment plan.

Quick Tips <

- If you do need to share information with others, try to **involve the young person**.
- Tell the young person you **care about them** and **want to help**. Once you've talked about your concerns, a possible next step is to talk about variety of ways to get support
- Pay attention to your young person's needs, **support their treatment plan** if they want this, and let them know **you're there for them**.