



Tips for Starting Mental Health Conversations

Once you've identified a student with concerns and/or indicators of a mental health problem, your next step may be to talk with the student, the family member or caregiver, or a mental health professional. Starting a conversation often means checking in privately and gently sharing your observed concerns.

Asking open-ended questions is a great place to start, and they provide the student or caregiver the opportunity to share what they are thinking and feeling. Closed-ended questions are more likely to be met with just "yes" or "no" answers, whereas open-ended questions that begin with "what" or "how" typically result in a fuller response with more information.

Name the Emotion

You seem more _____
(*upset, frustrated, down,
angry, quieter*) than usual.

Name the Behavior

I notice _____ (you
haven't been spending
time with your friends;
you've been missing
class).

Ask Open-Ended Questions

How are things between
you and your friends?

What is your experience of
your child's worries

Show You Are Listening

I can see how that would
be upsetting.

Show You Care

I care about your well-
being and am here to
listen.

Provide Information on Available Support

Would you like me to
provide you with information
about our school
counseling resources?

You can show you care by how you communicate and listen. Showing you care can be as simple as letting the student know that you are there for them and care about their well-being. It also means suspending judgment and showing you respect their thoughts and feelings, even if you disagree with them.

After listening and showing that you care, it may be helpful to provide information about available supports and resources. It is often helpful to ask permission before providing information and support. For example, you may start by saying "Would you like for me to provide you with some information about our school counseling resources?"

If you are not comfortable approaching a student or caregiver about a mental health concern, it may be helpful to first speak with a school mental health professional in the school to get their opinion and ask for help.

