

HELPING YOUTH THROUGH EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

Young people often communicate distress through behavior before they have the words to explain it. Changes in sleep, grades, friendships, irritability, appetite, attendance, risk-taking, or interest in favorite activities can signal that something needs attention.

What to do:

- Choose a low-pressure moment, such as a car ride, walk, or quiet time at home.
- Lead with observation rather than accusation: "I've noticed you've been spending more time alone. How have you been feeling?"
- Take their experience seriously, even when the problem seems temporary from an adult perspective.
- Ask directly about self-harm or suicide if you are concerned. Clear questions communicate that difficult topics are safe to discuss.
- Help identify more than one trusted adult the young person can contact, including school, family, health care, or community supports.



Keep in mind: Avoid turning the conversation into an interrogation. Teens may need time before they are ready to talk. Let them know the door remains open and continue checking in.

Caregivers also need support. You do not have to manage a young person's crisis alone. Seek professional guidance when distress is persistent, worsening, affecting daily life, or includes thoughts of self-harm or suicide.