

support for educators



to help young people navigate relationships

Secondary school can be a challenging time for young people making social connections.

There are many different types of relationships — those with classmates, friends and family members, to ones with romantic partners. These interactions and the way young people treat each other can greatly impact their mental health and the mental health of those around them. Relationships can bring joy, but they can also bring challenges and stress that can negatively impact a young person's emotional and social wellbeing.

Sometimes these stressors can feel overwhelming. It's important that young people know that they don't have to wait to ask for help — that now is a good time to talk.

Having the support of educators can make a huge difference to a young person's life and their emotional wellbeing. As an educator, this means recognising when someone is struggling emotionally, and what to do to support them.

This is where the headspace NIP it in the bud framework can be a useful tool for educators when offering support to young people navigating relationships. The NIP framework helps you to **Notice** changes in mood and behaviour, **Inquire** sensitively and competently, and **Provide** information to help young people access the right support.



Notice

The first step is to notice changes in a young person's behaviour. Remember that some changes can be developmentally appropriate.

As part of your assessment, consider individual factors like their temperament, sociability or disability. The way they regulate their emotions can also be influenced by their cultural, family and personal experiences, and trauma.

If they seem distressed, try to gauge how long they may have been this way. Look for signs and symptoms of emerging mental health problems to identify students who may need additional support.

Signs to look out for:

- Noticeable changes in behaviour with others e.g. feelings of anger, sadness, lack of focus
- Impact of particular relationships on behaviour and/or emotions, especially during or after an interaction with that particular person or group
- Negative impact to mental health or wellbeing after relationship breakdown
- Easily irritated and having problems with friends e.g. withdrawal, acting out
- No longer enjoying things that interest them
- Changes in eating or sleeping
- Turning to alcohol or drugs to cope with feelings
- Unusually stressed or worried.



Inquire

This is the opportunity to find out what's going on. Gather information so you can assess the need for additional support or action. Create a safe space for the young person to release their emotions. Listening with empathy and compassion can be just as valuable as offering solutions.

There's no perfect way to start a conversation about mental health. It can help to do some research first and find a time and place where everyone involved is feeling safe to talk about it.

When asking, it can help to be specific about the things you've noticed. And remember, you're asking to understand, so it's important that you don't make assumptions. Understanding the young person's experience can leave you in a better place to respond in a way that helps.

Some ways to try having this conversation might be:

- "Hey, I've noticed you seem to have a lot on your mind at the moment. I'd like to hear how it's been for you."
- "I haven't seen you with the friends you usually hang out with. How have things been going?"

Things to remember:

1. Non-judgmental, active listening
2. Appropriate space, time, person
3. Be aware of body language and positioning
4. Acknowledge their experience
5. Reflect and clarify the details
6. Offer reassurance and promote hope
7. Normalise experience without minimising
8. Validate and promote help seeking (see next step: Provide)



Provide

It's about having a two-way conversation with that young person to help them decide what they might need at that time, and you as the educator helping them plan the steps of how to access it. Responding in a way that shows you can make an impact.

Based on what comes out of your conversation, you'll have a direction for what further support you may need.

Questions you could ask:

- "It sounds like your relationship with X is a bit stressful at the moment. Would you like to have a go with me at figuring out some ways to talk to X or manage your relationship with them?"
- "Would you like me to help you to figure out some coping skills?"
- "I know of a great service that has lots of experience with this — how would you feel about us checking out their website together?"



For more information on how to support your young person using the NIP it in the bud framework, visit headspace.org.au/nipitinthebud

