



# support for educators

## to help young people exploring their identity

**Secondary school can be a time of self-discovery, learning and change.**

This is a time when many young people start exploring their identity – it can include culture and ethnicity, beliefs and values, gender and sexuality, and more. It can be a stressful and confusing time as they learn more about themselves. Young people can feel isolated. They can feel that nobody understands what they're going through.

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 knowing when someone is struggling emotionally, and what to do to support them.

This is where the headspace NIP in the bud framework can be a useful tool for educators when offering support to young people exploring their identity. 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 e.g. feelings of anger, sadness, lack of focus
- No longer enjoying things that interest them
- Easily irritated and having problems with friends e.g. withdrawal, acting out.



## Inquire

This is the opportunity to gather important information to 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. Nonjudgmental, 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 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 home is a bit stressful at the moment. Would you like to have a go with me at figuring out some ways to take some of that stress away?"
- "I know of a great service that has lots of experience with this – how would you feel about us checking out their website together?"
- "Would you like me to help you figure out ways that you think would help you?"



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

