



support for families

to help young people who are exploring their identity

Secondary school can be an amazing time of self-discovery, learning and change.

Along with studying, it's also when many young people start exploring the elements that make up their identity. There's plenty to explore, including ethnicity, culture, beliefs and values, gender and sexuality, and more.

It can be a stressful and confusing time — for families and their young people — as they learn more about themselves. They can feel isolated. They can feel that nobody understands what they're going through.

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

Having the support of family and friends can make a difference to a young person's life and their emotional wellbeing. For you, it means acknowledging when they're struggling emotionally, and what to do to support them.

This is where the headspace NIP it in the bud framework can help to resolve problems before they feel too overwhelming to manage. 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 your young persons behaviour.

You may want to consider whether they're being affected by other things — like what's happening at school with their friends, interactions on social media, issues in the media etc.

If you have noticed changes in their behaviour, try to work out how long it might have gone on for. There might be other symptoms of emerging mental wellbeing problems that they may need extra support for.

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
- Changes in eating or sleeping
- Turning to alcohol or drugs to cope with feelings
- Unusually stressed or worried.



Inquire

This is your opportunity to ask and gather the information you need to work out what other support or action you may need to take. It's important to ask what the young person needs, rather than assume. Remember, listening can be just as powerful as offering solutions.

There's no perfect way to start a conversation about mental health. Find a time and place where everyone involved is feeling safe to talk about it.

You're trying to understand their experience so you're in a better place to help. 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. Do you want to talk about it?"

- "How are your friends at the moment, how have things been going with them?"
- A way to start a conversation could even just be an invitation to do something together. Then, you can try asking about things once you're doing the activity. Asking straight up could be too intense.

How to help:

1. Don't be judgmental, and actively listen
2. Choose an appropriate place and time, with the right people there
3. Be aware of your body language and theirs
4. Acknowledge their experience
5. Reflect and clarify the details
6. Give them reassurance and be hopeful
7. Normalise their experience, don't minimise it
8. Validate and encourage them to seek help (see next step: Provide)



Provide

It's about having a two-way conversation with your young person to help them decide what they might need at that time, and you as a family member helping them plan the steps to access it. Responding in a way that shows you are there for them.

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 things at school are really tough right now. How would you feel about us having a brainstorm on some things we could try to ease the stress?"
- "I'd like to find a way that I can be helpful for you. Would that be OK for you?"
- "I'm not feeling very confident about the best way to help at the moment. Would it be OK if we called a service to help us figure out the best way forward?"
- "I'm hearing that X is really difficult at the moment, and I'm really glad you've come to me. I don't know a lot about X, but I'd really like to learn so that we can work through this together – how do you feel about that?"



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

