

How can I help my child share their worries with me?

If your child is not talking to you about their worries, it is natural for you to feel concerned. Children often struggle to share what is going on in their lives for many reasons. According to parents.actionforchildren.org.uk, these could be:

- *Fear of getting told off*
- *Feel shame or embarrassment*
- *Think that the person they tell won't care or want to listen to them*
- *Worry that you will dismiss their concerns as not important*

Help your child feel safe

Try to create a safe space where your child feels comfortable opening up to you. Children want to know you will love them no matter what. Find ways to help them understand that this is the case. Let them know they can share or talk to you about anything and that they are not alone.

Prioritise one-to-one time

Spend regular one-to-one time with your child. Do things you enjoy together such as cooking, crafts, or going for a walk. This helps build your relationship. They may also feel more able to talk about their feelings in a relaxed setting when they are ready. Some children may want to talk before bed. Create time to listen and help them offload, if they need to. You can then do something relaxing like reading together before they go to sleep.

Try sideways listening

Children might feel more comfortable sharing worries when they are next to you instead of facing you. This is called sideways listening. Car journeys, washing up and walking are good opportunities for this.

Normalise sharing

Create a family culture where you spend time together, have fun and share thoughts and feelings with each other. Try eating meals together, playing games, watching films and sharing stories about your day. You could talk about what went well, what was challenging and how you solved problems. It is important that you share your own feelings to show it is OK to discuss worries and ask for support.

Offer alternatives to talking

Some children may prefer communicating in a less direct way. Older children and teenagers might find it easier to use text, voice recordings or video calls. For younger children, toys or aids can help. These include:

- *A worry box*: use a box or make one and ask your child to write down any worries and put them in the box
- *Pebbles*: give your child a pebble or shell and encourage them to place it somewhere you will see. It indicates that they want to talk to you without having to open the conversation
- *Worry monster*: it might be helpful to use the idea of a 'worry monster' with your child. The monster eats the worries and you take them out. You can draw a monster or make one out of what you have around the house.
- *Books*: Try 'Huge Bag of Worries' (age four to eight) or 'Ruby's Worry' (age three to seven).

Consider your own reactions

Think about how you react to the little things they share. It shows them how you might respond to the big things. If your child tells you something find difficult, try not to look surprised or shocked. This may make them reluctant to share more. Let them know they have done the right thing in telling you. Reassure them you will approach any problems together.

Be patient

Do not push your child to share. Let them do it when they are ready. Remind them often that you are there for them. Be prepared for your child sharing something at a time that feels inconvenient for you. Keep in mind they may have been building themselves up to share. If possible, make time to listen.

Get support

Think about other people your child could talk to. It is important that your child feels they have someone to share their concerns with, even if that is not you.



working together to keep our children safe and happy.