

Support a Teen Who Opens Up

Teens and supportive adults | Adults | 10 to 15 minutes

Help a supportive adult respond with curiosity, clarity, and practical follow-through.

When a teen shares something difficult, your first task is to understand what they are telling you. You can be calm and honest without pretending to have every answer. The conversation may need more than one sitting.

Listen before organizing a solution

Try: "Thank you for telling me. What has this been like for you?" Reflect what you heard and ask whether they want listening, help deciding, or practical action. Avoid immediate comparisons, lectures, or demands for every detail.

Be accurate about privacy

Do not promise to keep every secret. Explain when safety concerns may require involving someone else, and discuss what will be shared when possible. Ask the teen who feels supportive and what makes an adult feel safe or unsafe to approach.

Agree on a useful next step

Choose one action together: contacting a clinician, asking for school support, changing an overwhelming demand, or checking in at a chosen time. Notice whether the concern persists or disrupts daily life. Professional assessment can clarify what support is needed.

Respond to danger directly

Take statements about self-harm, suicide, abuse, or immediate danger seriously. Seek prompt professional or emergency help according to the situation. In the United States, 988 offers crisis support; use 911 for medical emergencies or immediate danger.

One phrase and one action I want to practice