

## **Support for Children and Young People**

### **How can adults respond to Black young people talking about their mental health?**

Every young person deserves to have someone to turn to, to talk about their mental health and we recognize the immense impact that recent social unrest will have on children and young people who are Black, Asian or from a Minority Ethnic heritage. The adults around such children must provide a space to listen, and to support them with accessing further help when needed. We know that every adult that a young person reaches out to needs to feel confident and equipped to help them.

It is important that no young person feels alone with their mental health during this difficult period. We recognise that we have to be better at reaching and representing racialised young people, and the adults around them, who have been marginalised by the system.

#### **Active Listening**

If you work with young people, you play a vital role in supporting their mental health and wellbeing. Active listening is an essential skill that can help you create a safe and supportive space for young people to talk about their feelings and experiences.

#### **What is Active Listening?**

Active listening is a way of listening attentively to someone and demonstrating that you are fully engaged in the conversation. It involves not only hearing what someone is saying, but also understanding their emotions, thoughts and concerns.

By actively listening, you can help young people feel heard and understood, which can be a powerful tool in building trust and supporting their mental health.



## **Pay Attention**

When a young person wants to talk, demonstrate you're paying attention to them and taking them seriously. Stay focused on what the young person is saying and listen without interrupting or judging. Eye contact is often important, but too much may be intimidating and some people don't like much eye contact at all. Avoid distractions such as having your phone out or other conversations happening around you.

## **Validate their feelings**

Validating someone's feelings means acknowledging that their emotions are real and important. You can do this by saying things like "It's okay to feel that way" or "I can understand why you would feel that way".

## **Acknowledge their perspective**

Give space for the young person to express their feelings without judgement or interruption, and reflect their feelings back to them. For example, "It sounds like you're feeling really sad about this".

## **Ask open ended questions**

Open-ended questions are questions that require more than a yes or no answer. They encourage young people to talk more and share their thoughts and feelings. Examples of open-ended questions include "How did that make you feel?" or "What happened next?"



## **Make space for silence**

It can be tempting to jump in and fill a silence with an offer of advice, a solution or your own experience. However, it's important to remember that making space for silence gives the young person the chance to consider if there's anything else they want to share. Often silences aren't as long as they can feel - particularly if a young person is sharing something that feels big or unknown to them. Make sure your body language remains engaged, so the young person knows you're still paying attention.

## **Paraphrase and summarise**

Paraphrasing means repeating back what the young person has said in your own words. This can help to clarify any misunderstandings and show that you have understood.

Summarising involves putting together the main points of what the young person has said.

In both instances, try not to put your own perspective on what they have said. When young people hear their comments reflected back, it can help them see the bigger picture and identify patterns themselves

**By practicing active listening throughout this difficult time, you can create a safe and supportive environment for young people to talk about their experiences of social unrest and the impact that this has on their mental health. Remember to be patient and non-judgmental, and to show that you care about what they are saying. Your support can make a real difference in helping young people to manage their mental health and build resilience for the future.**

