

Advice for Parents & Caregivers

When to Seek Help



Before we start

If you're unsure whether to ask for help, that uncertainty matters. Many parents hesitate because they don't want to overreact.

This guide is here to steady you. Asking for help is about safety and support, not failure.

Who this guide is for

This is for parents and carers who want calm, clear guidance on when and how to seek help if they're worried about a child or young person.

Why this matters

When concerns feel unclear, people often wait. Early support can prevent harm from escalating and can make situations easier to manage.

What seeking help really means

Seeking help doesn't mean something has gone wrong. It means you've noticed a concern and you're involving the right support early.

What we see in real life

In real life, people often delay asking for help because situations don't feel clear-cut. Many parents worry about overreacting, being judged, or causing unnecessary attention.

What parents often feel: Fear of making things worse, uncertainty about who to contact, or guilt about involving professionals can lead to waiting longer than feels comfortable.

What young people often feel: Worry about getting into trouble, losing trust, or having freedoms taken away. This can make them hide symptoms or downplay how unwell they feel.

Why help is delayed: When signs come and go, it's easy to hope things will settle on their own. This can allow problems to quietly grow rather than resolve.

What helps in practice: Treating help as a safety net rather than an emergency response makes it easier to reach out earlier. Asking for advice does not lock you into a specific outcome.

Why early support matters: Getting advice early often leads to simpler steps and less disruption than waiting until a situation becomes urgent.

What needs urgent help

Call 999 immediately if someone has trouble breathing, collapses, is unconscious, has a seizure, severe chest pain, repeated vomiting, or you think there may be an overdose.

What needs prompt professional advice

Speak to a GP, NHS 111, or local services if you notice ongoing mental health changes, escalating substance use, physical symptoms, or withdrawal from normal life.

What can often be handled with early support

Early concerns, questions about substances, changes in behaviour, or worries about peer pressure can often be discussed with school staff, youth services, or trusted professionals.

Why harm sometimes escalates

Harm can escalate when concerns are minimised, families feel isolated, or young people feel unable to ask for help.

Signs something may not be right

Patterns matter more than single signs. Look for ongoing secrecy, mood changes, physical symptoms, school issues, isolation, or risk-taking behaviour.

How to talk to your child about getting help

Frame help as support, not trouble. Explain that adults get help too and that safety comes first.

What your child can say if they need help

Ages 10–12

- I don't feel right.
- I need help.
- Can we tell an adult?

Ages 13–15

- I'm not okay.
- I think I need help.
- Can we talk to someone?

Ages 16–18

- I need medical help.
- Something's wrong.
- I'm not safe right now.

A final note

If you're unsure, it's always okay to ask for advice. Seeking help early is a sign of care, not failure.

Educational use only. Not medical advice. If someone is unwell or at risk, seek professional medical help or call 999 in an emergency.