



**"LET US TALK ABOUT OUR EXPERIENCES
FREE OF JUDGEMENT"**

Young people with distressing experiences may not seek help because they worry about being misunderstood and judged negatively. It is important to create a safe space for them.

**"SEE EACH OF US AS A WHOLE PERSON,
WE'RE MORE THAN OUR DISTRESS"**

It matters to young people that they are treated as individuals, with their own unique story, interests, and values. There is more to them than what they need help with.

**"PROMOTE GOOD INTERACTIONS
THAT SUPPORT AND EMPOWER US"**

Their confidence and sense of agency increase when young people are encouraged to be part of the process of identifying problems and making decisions.

**"HELP US FEEL INCLUDED
AND FORM CONNECTIONS"**

Opportunities to meet new people, make friends, and join in activities with others can be facilitated through community groups, education, research, and employment.



UK Research
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Some of things you say to make me feel better do not help.



"Everyone goes through what you are experiencing".

"If you just try harder then things will get better."

"Just snap out of it."

These are examples of common phrases that feel judgemental.

They are unhelpful because they make us feel like our voices and experiences are invalid and not genuine enough.

They make us feel small. They suggest that we should not be so sensitive towards what we are experiencing.



"If I can do it, you can do it too."

"Maybe you don't want it enough."

We know it's meant to be encouraging for us to hear how you have overcome something challenging.

It's supposed to make us feel less alone but it has the opposite effect.

This is because you are (unintentionally) invalidating our individuality.

Even people with similar upbringings and life issues might deal with the same thing differently.



We are the experts
of our own
experience.

“Just because you’re
feeling it, doesn’t mean
it’s actually a problem.”

“It’s really not that big
of a deal.”

“Don’t be dramatic.”

At any age, it is difficult
to be vulnerable and
open up about one’s
feelings. For a young
person, it can be even
more difficult because
we are still trying to
find our way in the
world.

What might not feel like
a problem to you might
be the main stressor in
our lives.

While your intention may
be to make us realise
that things aren’t as bad
as they seem, your
words inadvertently
invalidate our feelings.


“Are you sure that’s
what it is?”

Questioning our
experience despite us
being the ones who lived
it can be good or can be
bad, depending on the
circumstances.

But the tone of voice is
important. The
questioning is often done
in a patronising way.

What would be useful is
first validating our
experience, and then, if
you still have questions,
follow up with purpose:

“I understand how you
feel and that must be
difficult. Have you
thought about it this
other way before?”



When someone actively listens to me, I feel I can share anything.

"I am sorry you are going through such a hard time".

This makes us feel understood and listened to.

"I can imagine things are really difficult right now - I wonder what that brings up for you?"

This gives us a safe and open space to share whatever is on our minds.

Being seen as a whole person makes us feel that we can trust you.

It also allows us to feel comfortable in sharing our experiences in detail because we know that you're trying to see the full picture.

"I am here for you."

"I wonder how that feels for you now."

It can be hard to convey how we're feeling so it can be even harder for you to know exactly what we need. A sincere and open statement shows that you care and will help however you can.

Young people Chris, Josh, Catherine, Michelle, and Carmen contributed to the content and design of this leaflet.

More about our project here: <https://mcpin.org/project/agency>.