Talking about mental health with your or another child

* Find an appropriate time and relaxed place to have a conversation with your child if you are concerned at all.
* If you invite a young person to tell you their personal issues, be clear what you will do with this information. Consider how you will respond if asked ‘not to tell anyone’.
* Sit on a low chair if you can – so there is less height difference and you will be more approachable.
* Simply explain why you are asking to talk. For example, ‘you said something interesting at dinner about how you felt when… How do you feel about it now?’
* If not your child, check with the child if there are other trusted adults (parents, the wider family, teachers) or friends they have talked to or could talk to.
* Listen carefully, be patient and friendly and give your full attention.
* Check your body language so that the child knows you are focusing on them.
* Take what they’re saying seriously. Don’t over-react but don’t try to minimize or dismiss what they are saying. Ask open questions to encourage them to talk. For example, “It sounds like you had a hard day today. I would like to hear more if you feel like talking about it…”
* Be calm and acknowledge their feelings.
* For young children drawing, modelling or playing with toys while the conversation is progressing can be helpful.
* Offer empathy and understanding rather than solutions. When a child receives empathy they begin to develop trust.
* Remember we are all different and children will respond in their own unique way to their experiences.
* Remember that children with special educational needs & disability may struggle even more to articulate their feelings and thoughts and may need extra support.