# Tip sheet 2:
# Talking about networks



## 2.1 Why this matters

- Young people often delay asking for help, especially if the harm involves someone they know.
- Some are unsure who they can talk with or worry they won't be believed.
- A strong safety network helps young people feel less alone and get support early.
- Networks help keep young people safe both online and offline.
- One trusted adult can make a big difference.

## 2.2 What you might notice

Young people building or testing their networks may:

- hesitate or test your reaction with a small comment
- use a friend's story to see how you respond (they are often checking if you will judge the situation)
- worry about bothering someone
- rely mostly on friends their own age
- show stress through tired eyes, stomach aches or restlessness.

These responses are common. They often show caution, not avoidance.

## 2.3 What helps

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| **Normalising help-seeking** | Let them know everyone needs support sometimes. |
| **Building layers of support** | Help them identify at least 3 - 5 people across different areas (home, school, clubs or online) so they always have a backup. |
| **Naming trusted adults** | Ask who feels safe, who listens well and who they would go to first. |
| **Practicing conversation starters** | Help them prepare for a hard conversation or asking for help. |
| **Being consistent** | Predictable responses build trust over time. |
| **Checking in over time** | Networks change as relationships shift. |

For more information, see **Support services for adults** from the Trusted Adult Guide.

## 2.4 What to avoid

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| **Assuming you understand** | Avoid: ‘I know exactly what you mean.’ Ask them to explain it in their own words. |
| **Giving advice too soon** | Avoid: ‘Here’s what you should do.’ Listen first, then offer options. |
| **Overloading with information** | Too many options can overwhelm. Keep it simple. |
| **Brushing off their feelings** | Avoid saying things that make their feelings seem small. Acknowledge what they’re feeling and listen. |
| **Sharing adult problems** | Sharing your own hard experiences can feel too heavy. Keep the focus on the young person. |
| **Promising to keep secrets** | Be honest that you can’t keep a secret if someone might be unsafe. Networks are about sharing the load. |
| **Assuming silence means ‘OK’** | They may be scared, unsure or testing your response. |

## 2.5 Quick responses

These are suggestions. Use your own words and adapt them to suit you and the young person.

| If the young person… | You can say or do… |
|---|---|
| **Is unsure who to talk with** | *‘Let’s think about who feels safe for you.’* |
| **Relies only on peers** | *‘Friends are great for support, but for big safety things, you need an adult’s power to help fix it. Who is an adult you trust?’* |
| **Wants help starting a conversation** | *‘We can practice what you want to say.’* |
| **Feels nervous asking for help** | *‘It’s normal to feel that way. You’re not alone.’* |
| **Says they don’t want to bother anyone** | *‘There are people who care about you and want to help.’* |
| **Is unsure** | *‘You don’t have to carry this alone. Let’s think about who else in your network needs to know so we can keep you safe.’* |

If the young person shares something that feels unsafe, stay calm and follow the steps in **How to respond: The 6-step-framework**. If you’re unsure what to do, check in with another trusted adult or a professional. You don’t have to do this alone.

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