



TALKING ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

This strategy is suggested in the 14-16 BrainWaves lesson:

Talking to friends about mental health

About the strategy

Opening up and talking to others about their mental health—especially to friends and trusted peers—is regarded as one of the most effective ways for young people to manage daily stress, emotional distress, and emerging mental health challenges. Communicating personal struggles turns internal, isolating feelings into shared experiences:

- **Why Talking Helps (General Support):** Expressing feelings verbally helps process emotions, reduces physiological stress levels, and breaks down internal stigma.
- **Why Peer Support Matters for Young People:** During adolescence, peer relationships become a primary source of emotional security and social validation. Young people often prefer reaching out to friends because peers offer relatable contexts, low-stakes interactions, and immediate empathy without the perceived threat of judgment or loss of autonomy.

The scientific evidence behind the strategy

Research into youth help-seeking behaviors reveals a clear hierarchy: adolescents turn to friends first when self-reliance fails.

The landmark review below showed that informal sources of help (friends and family) were preferred to formal sources at all ages and for both genders.

- Rickwood, D., et al. (2005). *Young people's help-seeking for mental health problems*. Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health, 4(3), pp.218–251.

The following study showed that peer support consistently reduces depression, anxiety, and distress in young adults while improving self-esteem, coping mechanisms, and overall mental well-being across various settings.

- Richard, J., et al. (2022) *Scoping review to evaluate the effects of peer support on the mental health of young adults*. BMJ Open, 12(8), p. e061336.

Further reading

This blog from the Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health provides an excellent overview of young people's help-seeking behaviours:

<https://www.acamh.org/blog/young-peoples-help-seeking-behaviours>