

Quick Guide for School Staff

RESPONDING TO A DISTRESSED PUPIL

This card is designed to help school staff respond calmly and confidently when a pupil appears distressed. You do not need to have all the answers – listening, reassuring, and following your school's safeguarding procedures can make a real difference.

Helpful phrases you can use

- "Thank you for telling me. That can't have been easy."
- "I'm sorry you're going through this."
- "I understand."
- "You don't have to go through this alone."
- "I'm not going anywhere – take your time."
- "Thank you for trusting me."
- "How can I best support you right now?"

In the moment



Stay calm

Your calm presence helps create a sense of safety.



Move to a quiet space

If possible, away from other pupils and distractions.



Listen, don't investigate

Let the pupil speak. Avoid interrogating or jumping to conclusions.



Show you care

Take their concerns seriously and respond with kindness.



Reassure and signpost

Take their concerns seriously and respond with kindness.

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Avoid saying...

- "I'm sure it's not as bad as it seems."
- "You have so much to be grateful for."
- "Other people have it worse."
- "You just need to cheer up."

However well-intentioned, can cause a pupil to shut down or feel that their experience is being dismissed.

What staff should do

- Listen without judgement
- Allow them to talk at their own pace
- Record your concerns as soon as possible
- Share concerns and follow your school's safeguarding procedures

Who to contact

Speak to your:

- Designated Safeguarding Lead
- Pastoral Lead

External support if needed)

- Your local CAMHS
- The pupil's GP for urgent appointment
- NHS 111
- 999 for immediate risk