



talking about it

We all know it is good to talk, but often it is easier said than done, especially if the topic may feel embarrassing to talk about like bowels and poo..

Younger children can find it difficult to put their feelings into words. Older children and teenagers can have the same problem, and this can be compounded by a reluctance to open up.

If people do not express their emotions, it can come out in other ways. Feeling angry after diagnosis may be directed at a sibling, for example. And fear of the future can make children and young people withdraw from friends and family.

Of course, parents and carers are not immune to this. You are also going through a tough time as you struggle to adapt to a new reality.

Remember though, you are not the only ones. Many families – even those who are not living with IBD – experience similar problems.

We are here to help. Here, we share some practical ways you can help yourself and your children to express themselves and stay emotionally healthy.



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hints and tips

- **It is not your fault.** Your family might have different worries to others but opening up is difficult for many young people.
- **Give them a safe space.** Try setting aside a regular hour of one-to-one time for each child. Make it the same time each week and tell them they can talk about anything they want without judgment.
- **Listen.** It sounds obvious, but sometimes it can be tempting to jump in and ask questions. If you try to step back and just listen, you might find your children are more willing to open up.
- **Young people are more likely to open up to you if you have a strong relationship.** Building trust in each other is an essential part of that. Show you trust them by giving them responsibility for something in the household. It could be managing their own medication, looking after a younger sibling, or just popping to the shop for something you have forgotten, for example.
- **Another good way to build trust** is to spend time together doing things you both enjoy. It might be watching films or going to sporting events, for example.
- **Try to control your emotions.** It is easy for tempers to flare when teenagers are rude. But try to stay calm. Remember, they are not as able to cope with their emotions as you are. Try closing your eyes and counting to ten. Or pressing 'pause' on the conversation until you have both calmed down.
- **Use your support network.** You need support too, so remember your friends and family want to help. You could try setting up a regular phone call or visit with a friend or family member. Sometimes it can help to tell them what you want to talk about in advance.



"I had to make sure that Max would never feel the way I had felt. That talking about his condition without shame or embarrassment would be the norm. That he never felt alone. And so, bowels, toilet habits and poo became a celebrated topic of conversation in our house! Max seemed completely comfortable talking about his condition, and so I encouraged this."

Jen, mother to a child with IBD who also had the condition as a child.

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activity one

Starting conversations

If you can answer a question with a 'yes' or a 'no', it is a closed question. Open questions start with words like 'how', 'why', 'what', and 'where'. Using open questions gives children and young people more of a chance to explain how they feel. It also means you can gather more information about what might be wrong.

Try our open questions quiz to see how you could be reframing your questions and easing conversations.

Which questions do you think would get the most useful reply from your child?

- 1)
 - a. Did you have a good day at school today?
 - b. What happened at school today?
- 2)
 - a. Has your medicine given you any side effects?
 - b. How is your medicine making you feel?
- 3)
 - a. Do you understand what the doctor said?
 - b. What do you think about what the doctor said?
- 4)
 - a. Are you annoyed that you are missing out on the school trip?
 - b. How do you feel about missing the school trip?
- 5)
 - a. Are you angry with your brother/sister?
 - b. What is going on between you and your brother/sister?



activity two

Conducting conversations

Starting a conversation is one thing, but how do you keep it going?

You could:

- 1) Show them you have heard them by repeating their concerns back to them. Try using phrases like 'so what you are saying is...'
- 2) Try to understand their perspective, even though it might be different from yours
- 3) Do not argue, especially if you are the reason they are frustrated
- 4) You do not always need to have a solution. It is really important to validate their feelings, rather than always trying to fix things. You can do this by simply repeating back what you have heard. Something like 'I can hear that you're feeling really sad/angry/upset right now, and that things are really tough for you', usually works well.
- 5) Be interested and, above all, sincere.

Also, be realistic about what your teenager might want to talk to you about. It is normal for them to be more embarrassed and private about some things and to start to feel more comfortable talking to their friends than their family.

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more ways to get help or support

- [Watch](#) Dr Kate Blakeley talk about living and coping with IBD
- Speak to others in your situation at a CICRA [Family Day](#)
- Speak to Laura, CICRA's [Family Support Worker](#)
- See the emotional wellbeing kit [resources library](#) for lots more ideas and support
- For more advice and resources on effective parenting, check out Australia's [Raising Children Network](#).



"If you feel down or anxious, talk to someone."

Mansi, 13

do you need a little more help?

We designed this kit to help you and your family cope with some of the common ways IBD can make you all feel. But sometimes, your child might need a little more help – and that is OK.



Lots of people feel that way.

If you spot any of the following signs, it might be a good idea to ask their healthcare team if they can offer any extra psychological support, or at least point you in the right direction of services in your area:

- They say they feel as though they cannot cope
- They are struggling to use the tools in this kit
- The tools in this kit do not seem to be working for them
- A lack of interest in the things they usually enjoy
- A feeling of sadness that does not go away
- They express thoughts of harming themselves or others