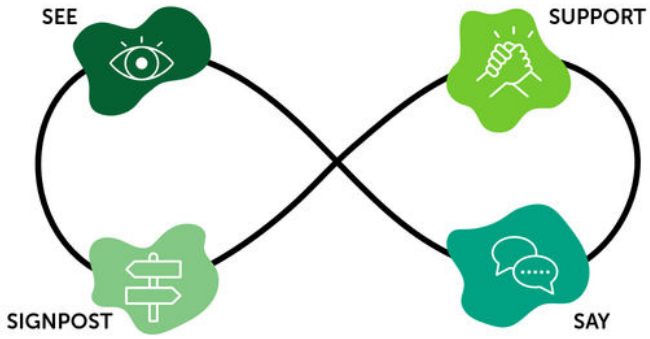
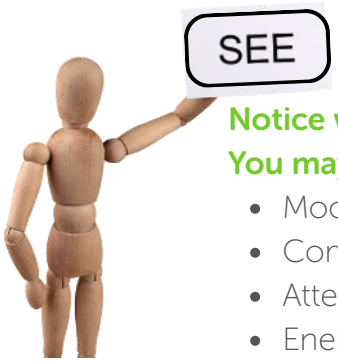
The 4S model of support

People don't always tell us directly when something is wrong.

Sometimes we notice a change in behaviour, mood, attendance, motivation, confidence, or how someone interacts with others. The 4S model provides a simple framework that can help you respond in a supportive and appropriate way, whether you're in a school, workplace, sports club, community group, or everyday setting.

The aim isn't to become a counsellor or solve somebody's problems. It's about recognising concerns, starting supportive conversations, and helping people access the right support when needed.





Notice what may be changing, the first step is often simply paying attention.

You may notice changes in:

- Mood or emotional reactions
- Communication or social interaction
- Attendance, punctuality, or participation
- Energy levels or motivation
- Appearance or self-care
- Behaviour that seems unusual for that person
- Increased irritability, frustration, or withdrawal

One sign alone doesn't necessarily mean something is wrong. Look for changes from what is normal for that individual.

✔️ Notice patterns, not just incidents
✔️ Stay curious rather than making assumptions
✔️ Focus on observable behaviours

✘ Don't jump to conclusions
✘ Don't assume you know the cause

Many people worry about saying the wrong thing.

Often, the most important thing is simply showing that you've noticed.

Useful conversation starters like:

"I've noticed you don't seem yourself lately."
"How have things been for you recently?"
"You seem a bit quieter than usual. Is everything okay?"
"I just wanted to check in and see how you're doing."

Helpful approaches

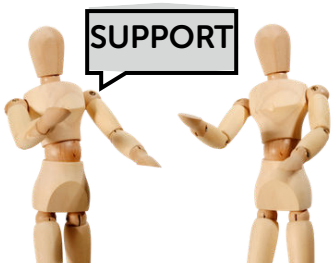
- Choose an appropriate time and place
- Ask open questions
- Use a calm and approachable tone
- Give people time to respond
- Accept that they may not want to talk right now

✔️ Listen more than you speak
✔️ Be genuine
✔️ Respect their choice if they don't wish to talk
✘ Avoid rushing to solutions
✘ Avoid judgement or criticism

You don't need to have all the answers.

Sometimes the most helpful thing you can do is provide a safe, respectful space for somebody to talk.

- Listen without interrupting
- Show empathy and understanding
- Reflect back what you've heard
- Ask what might help right now
- Encourage practical next steps
- Follow up later if appropriate



"That sounds really difficult."
"Thank you for telling me."
"I'm glad you spoke to me."
"What would be most helpful right now?"
Know your role

✔️ Be supportive
✔️ Maintain appropriate boundaries
✔️ Follow organisational procedures when necessary

✘ Don't promise confidentiality you cannot keep
✘ Don't take on more than your role allows

Support does not mean taking responsibility for fixing someone's problems, it means walking alongside them while helping them identify the support they need

Signposting means helping someone access appropriate information, services, or support networks.

Think what is available to you:

- Internal wellbeing support
- Managers or supervisors
- Pastoral teams
- Occupational health services
- **Isle Listen**
- School support staff
- Community organisations
- Helplines
- Health professionals
- Family, friends, or trusted networks

Signposting is about helping people understand their options, not telling them what they must do.

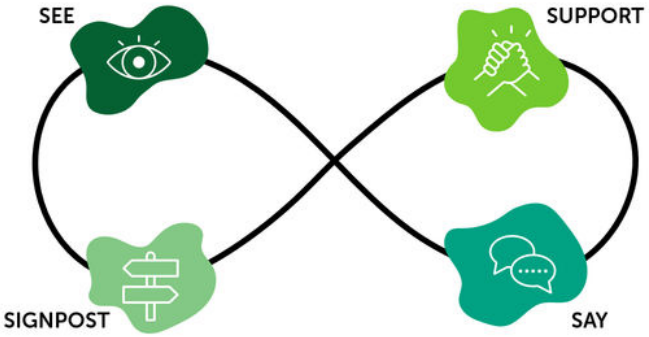
✔️ Provide clear information
✔️ Encourage help-seeking
✔️ Follow safeguarding or organisational procedures where required
✔️ Check understanding

SEE - Notice changes

SAY - Start a conversation

SUPPORT - Listen and respond

SIGNPOST - Help people access further support



Isle Listen is a trading name of MCH Psychological Services, a registered charity on the Isle of Man number 1024 and a registered organisational member of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.

ISLE LISTEN
Because Minds Matter