

Tip Sheet: Supporting Others with Mental Health Concerns

Anyone can experience mental health problems. Friends and family can make all the difference in a person's recovery process.

Supporting a Friend or Family Member with Mental Health Concerns

You can help your friend or family member by recognizing the signs of mental health problems and connecting them to professional help.

Talking to friends and family about mental health problems can be an opportunity to provide information, support, and guidance. Learning about mental health issues can lead to:

- Improved recognition of early signs of mental health problems
- Earlier treatment
- Greater understanding and compassion

If a friend or family member is showing signs of a mental health problem or reaching out to you for help, offer support by:

- Finding out if the person is getting the care that he or she needs and wants—if not, connect him or her to help
- Expressing your concern and support
- Reminding your friend or family member that help is available and that mental health problems can be treated
- Asking questions, listening to ideas, and being responsive when the topic of mental health problems come up
- Reassuring your friend or family member that you care about him or her
- Offering to help your friend or family member with everyday tasks
- Including your friend or family member in your plans—continue to invite him or her without being overbearing, even if your friend or family member resists your invitations
- Educating other people so they understand the facts about mental health problems and do not discriminate
- Treating people with mental health problems with respect, compassion, and empathy

How to Talk About Mental Health

Do you need help starting a conversation about mental health? Try leading with these questions and make sure to actively listen to your friend or family member's response.

- I've been worried about you. Can we talk about what you are experiencing? If not, who are you comfortable talking to?

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- What can I do to help you to talk about issues with your parents or someone else who is responsible and cares about you?
- What else can I help you with?
- I am someone who cares and wants to listen. What do you want me to know about how you are feeling?
- Who or what has helped you deal with similar issues in the past?
- Sometimes talking to someone who has dealt with a similar experience helps. Do you know of others who have experienced these types of problems who you can talk with?
- It seems like you are going through a difficult time. How can I help you to find help?
- How can I help you find more information about mental health problems?
- I'm concerned about your safety. Have you thought about harming yourself or others?

When talking about mental health problems:

- Know how to connect people to help
- Communicate in a straightforward manner
- Speak at a level appropriate to a person's age and development level (preschool children need fewer details as compared to teenagers)
- Discuss the topic when and where the person feels safe and comfortable
- Watch for reactions during the discussion and slow down or back up if the person becomes confused or looks upset

Sometimes it is helpful to make a comparison to a physical illness. For example, many people get sick with a cold or the flu, but only a few get really sick with something serious like pneumonia. People who have a cold are usually able to do their normal activities. However, if they get pneumonia, they will have to take medicine and may have to go to the hospital.

Similarly, feelings of sadness, anxiety, worry, irritability, or sleep problems are common for most people. However, when these feelings get very intense, last for a long period of time, and begin to interfere with school, work, and relationships, it may be a sign of a mental health problem. And just like people need to take medicine and get professional help for physical conditions, someone with a mental health problem may need to take medicine and/or participate in therapy in order to get better.

Get Help for Your Friend or Family Member

Seek immediate assistance if you think your friend or family member is in danger of harming themselves. You can call a crisis line or the National Suicide Prevention Line at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

Source: <https://www.mentalhealth.gov/talk/friends-family-members>