

# 7 tips for starting a conversation about mental health

**1. Check in with yourself.** Turn inward to set aside initial ideas and emotions in order to make space for the other person. Prepare to keep what is shared private unless you have concerns about their safety. *Ask yourself:*

- Am I in a place to be mentally present with this person. Can I put aside judgements and preconceived solutions and use active listening?
- What do I need to do to take care of myself before starting this conversation?

**2. Take a moment to organize your thoughts regarding your concerns.** *Ask yourself:*

- What have I seen or heard that is causing concern?
- What are some of this person's strengths?

**3. Pause and allow yourself a moment to connect with the feelings you think this person is experiencing.** Tap into these emotions just long enough to feel yourself connected to the individual.

- When have I experienced emotions like what I think this person is experiencing?
- How has another person been helpful to me when I was in need?

**4. Consider what approach would work best and whether they prefer communicating in person, over a text, email, or phone call.**

Opening up can be challenging, so providing an alternative activity to do while talking may be helpful, such as playing a game, coloring, or going for a walk. *Consider:*

- Where does this person feel most comfortable?
- What activities can we do together to help them feel safe?
- If I'm not sure, what will I do to try and create a safe space?

**5. Reflect back to this person some of the things you've noticed.** Do your best to ask open-ended questions, avoiding questions that can be answered with a "yes" or "no." Use "I" statements. As an active listener, summarize what you hear back to the person, being mindful to not attach judgement to your summary. *Consider saying:*

- "I've noticed you seem a little more \_\_\_\_\_ (sad, withdrawn, irritated) lately. How are you doing?"
- "I've noticed a change in your behavior/ mood. I care about you. Is there anything you'd like to talk about?"
- "I've noticed you have a lot going on. Is there anything I can do to lighten your load?"
- "It's been a little while since we connected. I wanted to check in with you."
- "I want you to show up in the best way for you. I'm wondering what support looks like for you?"



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### 6. Acknowledge that talking about tough stuff is hard.

Regardless of what they want to share, assure that you are here for them. Ask yourself how you will remain open, especially if what is being shared is hard to hear. *We recommend saying the following:*

- “We don’t need to figure out everything today. Whatever you share doesn’t change how I feel about you.”
- “It’s okay if you’re not sure about something. I’m just here to listen. I care about you.”
- “This sounds really hard, and I want you to know that you are not alone.”



### 7. Ask how you can best support this person.

**If you’re able to provide what they need,** say so. Agree to what you can do without feeling resentful later and do your very best to follow through and communicate if you’re no longer able to support them. If you have safety concerns, let a helping professional know and notify the person you’re supporting.

*You can say:*

- “How can I best support you right now?”
- “What has helped you when you’ve had challenges in the past?”
- “I care about you and want you to be safe. I know a helpful resource that can support you right now. Would you like to call 988 together? Or would you like me to do it for you?”

After providing support to someone, be sure to tend to your well-being. Helping others can be challenging and stressful at times. Do something intentional to release stress. Receive support for yourself if needed.

*Ask yourself:*

- What do I need right now?
- Who is a safe person to talk to about how I’m feeling?
- What would help me complete the stress cycle?