

How to support a friend or family member who needs help

If you think someone close to you is experiencing stress, depression, anxiety, addiction or suicidal thoughts, reaching out can make all the difference. They may be embarrassed, afraid or not know how to seek help. Offering your support sends a powerful message that they're not alone.

Here are some phrases to get the conversation going:

- How are you? Really?
- "I've noticed that you haven't seemed like yourself lately. Is there anything you want to talk about?"
- "I'm worried about you; it seems like you're having a tough time. How can I help?"
- "It seems like you are going through a lot right now. Can we talk about it?"
- "Would you be open to talking to a doctor or counselor about what you're going through? I can help you find those resources. You're not alone."

It can also be easy to invalidate someone's mental health experience, intentionally or unintentionally. Here are some phrases to avoid:

- **"I know exactly how you feel."** It's impossible to know exactly how the other person feels. This phrase can also turn the conversation back to your experience, causing the other person to shut down or feel like their story has been minimized.
- **"You have no reason to be depressed" / "It will pass" / "Just...don't feel that way."** Depression, anxiety and similar disorders are usually rooted in a situational trigger or chemical imbalance in the brain. Telling someone that their life is great or that they should look on the bright side will not improve their situation.

If you're not sure what to say, that is okay too. It's better just to empathize with the person and acknowledge their hurt rather than using a platitude to fill the space.

Offer concrete solutions

Often when you ask someone how you can help, they may not know how to respond in the moment or feel comfortable responding. Here are some direct questions you can ask:

- Can I bring you dinner?
- Would you like it if I came over?
- Can I make an appointment for you?
- Can I drive you to your appointment?

If you are specifically worried that someone may be suicidal, these questions can help you figure out how serious the situation is:

- Have you thought about hurting yourself? Are you currently hurting yourself?
- Have you thought about dying?
- Do you think your friends and family would be better off without you?
- Do you have a plan for dying and a means to carry out that plan?



If you are having this conversation with someone, do not leave them alone. Seek help immediately. Call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 800.273.8255.