

SEEKING HELP

What to say when you're not ok

Three powerful words that need to be expressed when they are true are: *"I'm not OK"*. That's the main thing we are trying to say. If they are the only words we can find, then that's still a job well done.

Write a draft script below of what you would like to say in an upcoming conversation.

| Step | Purpose | What you might say: |
|---------------------|--|---------------------|
| Check in | Ease into the conversation and create the right tone at the start by letting them know what you are there to talk about. | |
| Share your feelings | <i>Which emotions are most present for you?</i> These can be a list of the warning signs you are noticing. | |
| Provide context | Give them useful context that may be contributing to how you feel. Mention any key triggering events or situations that have affected you. | |

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|--------------|--|---------------------|
| Ask for help | Be honest about what we need from others. It's ok to ask for things. Maybe all we want them to do is listen, or maybe we are curious about what's worked for them. Be clear on how they can work with us to move forward. Being explicit about this is a big relief to the supporter as they will feel empowered to know what to do. | |

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Case Studies

Following are some examples of how someone struggling with a mental health concern asked for help. Use these, and the framework provided to organise your thoughts about how you might speak up about something you're going through.

Carol

45 yrs old, female

Civil Engineer

What's going on in her world?

- Carol's teenager daughter Sally is having complex emotional troubles and has been for about a year. Sally spends all her time in her room, doesn't communicate much, has outbursts of rage, has started self-harming and talking about not wanting to be here.
- Carol is divorced from Sally's dad and they're having co-parenting issues. They don't agree on how to handle things and information sharing.

What's she feeling?

- She feels helpless.
- She is distraught watching her daughter suffer.
- She's worried about Sally's access to the internet/social media and feels a bit inadequate with regards to her IT knowledge.
- Guilty that her failed relationship with Sally's dad and their divorce may have been a trigger.
- Scared that Sally is hiding a significant trauma, like sexual assault.

What's she experiencing?

- Fights with her ex-husband and with her daughter.
- Difficulty sleeping.
- Being snappy and impatient with the staff on her team at work.
- Comfort eating junk food.



Carol feels uncomfortable talking to any of her family members or friends about her daughter's personal issues. She is very concerned about confidentiality and doesn't want to betray Sally's trust by appearing to gossip. Last time she took Sally to see the GP, she gave Carol the names of a couple of psychologists and counsellors who may be good to reach out to for her own wellbeing. So, Carol booked an appointment with a counsellor. Here's what she might say:

"I've come to see you because my daughter is very distressed. She's self-harming, angry all the time and I don't know what to do about it. I am worried and I feel completely helpless.

I had a relatively sheltered upbringing and I didn't have any issues anything like what Sally is going through, so I feel like I can't relate. And when we fight she is constantly telling me that I don't understand.

I just want to make her safe and happy, and the fact that she's acting out like this makes me feel like I failed as a mum. I feel guilty that I may have caused it, because of the divorce.

Her father and I aren't making things any easier because we can't seem to agree on the best way to parent her, and I know the friction between us is making things worse for her; which is not what I want. I just feel scared that I missed something important, like there's something I don't know, and it keeps me up at night.

I'm getting snappy at work and not taking care of myself, I'm just exhausted and I don't know how much more I can take."

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Case Studies

Charlie

20 yrs old, non-binary

Vet Technician

What is going on in their world?

- They didn't get accepted into the university course to become a vet, which is their dream job.
- They have been on a series of bad dates and they're starting to feel like they will never find anyone to be in a relationship with.
- Charlie's mother died six months ago and there is some resentment and jostling among their brothers and sisters about sharing responsibilities of looking after their father now (dad uses a wheelchair).

What are they feeling?

- Sadness, grief and hopelessness about mum's death.
- Discouraged that they may not be able to pursue the career path they want.
- Unattractive and unlovable as a partner.
- Frustration that the siblings are arguing.

What are they experiencing?

- They have been hiding out in their apartment, eating junk food and drinking alcohol to distract from the tension in the family and the disappointment of not getting into university.
- They've bailed on social activities lately, and communication between friends has dropped off.
- They've started thinking about suicide.



There's one friend, Josh who just keeps on texting, no matter how many times Charlie bails on him, he keeps on checking in, just to see if they're ok. Charlie decides to invite Josh over to their apartment even though it's a mess and the recycling is full of alcohol bottles, because it just feels like too much effort to keep pretending that everything is ok. It feels like time to be honest. Here's what they might say:

"I'm sorry the place is such a mess. Thanks for bringing coffees over, I've actually run out. I know I've gone a bit AWOL lately; I just haven't felt like much fun to be around. It feels like all areas of my life have taken a dive at the same time, so all I want to do is hang out here and be away from the world.

I do appreciate you texting, I know I have been really flaky. I make plans sometimes because I know that I should try to get out and 'human', but then when the time comes it just all seems too hard, so I cancel. I'm sorry, I know that's so annoying and I feel really awful about it. Plus, I just can't deal with all the family stuff going on, I feel guilty that I am not doing enough to help dad, but being over there is really hard for me.

There's just so many reminders of mum. And I didn't get into university, I really thought I would. And don't even ask me about my tragic dating life, what a bin fire. See what I mean? It's just like one thing after the other. Every time I take a step forward, I keep getting knocked down. Nothing works, so sometimes I don't even feel like trying.

It means a lot to me that you're here though, and that you brought fruit salad. I don't think I've eaten anything healthy in about a month!"

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Case Studies

Brad

45 years old, male

Construction Manager

What's going on in his world?

- Brad made some mistakes with paying his staff and their superannuation. Now that the matter has come to light, he wants to do the right thing but financially the business can't support it.
- He's got a wife and 2 teenage kids who are relying on him to support them.

What's he feeling?

- Brad has been irritable lately, getting frustrated easily and quick to temper.
- Brad is worried about his relationship with his employees. Guilty that he let them down.
- He has fantasised about ending his life so that his family could have the insurance money.
- He's afraid of the legal ramifications of his business mistakes.
- Annoyed at himself because he should have known better.
- Embarrassed that he made the error.

What's he experiencing?

- Brad's been missing lots of family functions because he is spending long hours at his business.
- He feels physically ill most days, with a headache and nausea.
- He's avoiding phone calls at work because he's overwhelmed by the financial problem.
- He's kept the business problems secret from all of his family and friends, except for his wife.



Brad is starting to get desperate. He can't think about anything else besides the disastrous mess he has gotten his construction company into. He has told his wife the basics of what's going on and she's been understanding and supportive about wanting to work through it together.

Brad is finding himself snapping at the kids though, especially when they're asking for money and it's really straining the relationship. He's starting to feel like he hates himself and thinks everyone would be much better off without him. Finally, one night he decides to tell his wife just how bad things are in his mind. Here's what he might say:

"I think I might actually need some help. I'm at the point where I can't face it anymore, any of it. I have been feeling like you'd all be better off without me. I don't deserve you. I made a mess of everything. You and the kids deserve more.

I thought I was a good provider for the family but I made a stupid mistake and now we're in a total mess and so many people are affected. I just don't know what we're going to do to fix it.

Sometimes I think the best thing that I could do is check out and leave you guys with the insurance money. But then a tiny part of me knows that it wouldn't be that easy, it wouldn't solve anything, it would only create more heartache. I just feel so completely overwhelmed, but those thoughts won't go away. I think it would be best if I was to talk to someone about it, like a professional, and I was hoping you would come with me. What do you think?"