

# Talking with friends and family about mental health issues



## What can you do if someone you care about seems “not themselves,” stressed out or troubled?

It can be difficult to know how to help someone, especially if they don't talk about their struggles. But certain changes in behavior can give you clues about how someone may be feeling. You might notice certain posts on social media or observe a change in the way they talk about their life.

When you believe a friend or loved one may be experiencing mental or emotional distress, it can be hard to know what to say or what to do next. At the same time, you want to speak up out of concern and love and help that person stay safe. Read on to learn how you can be sensitive and helpful in such a situation.

### Recognizing symptoms of mental or emotional distress

Knowing the signs of mental distress can help you know when to reach out. Some of the signs include:

- Appearing sad, anxious or irritable
- Displaying changes in their typical mood or behaviors
- Sleeping a lot or very little
- Not eating or eating a lot more than usual
- Having trouble with focus or memory
- Acting paranoid or suspicious
- Hearing voices or seeing things that aren't there
- Talking about suicide or a desire to die
- Withdrawing from family, friends or activities they once enjoyed
- Expressing hopelessness or feeling they have no reason to live
- Talking about suicide or a desire to die
- Misusing drugs or alcohol



## When it's time to talk

Starting the conversation may feel uncomfortable, but it's important to reach out. They may act shocked or angry or deny they're having an issue. But they may also be relieved that someone cared enough to ask how they're doing. Knowing in advance how to handle a wide range of responses can help you make a difference for them.

Here are some tips for reaching out to offer support:

- Ask to talk in a safe, private place
- Describe what you've been seeing, using "I statements." For example:
  - "I've seen that you're posting a lot about depression on social media lately."
  - "I've noticed that you seem sad."
  - "I've missed you at \_\_\_\_\_. Are you doing okay?"
- Let them know they can be open and honest with whatever they're thinking or feeling
- Express that you care and you're there for them
- Take action if needed
  - Encourage them to connect with mental health support.

## Ways to take action

If your friend or family member needs additional support, you can help them connect with their primary care provider or a mental health professional. You can offer to help find a mental health counselor or schedule a telehealth appointment. You can also encourage them to contact the **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline**. They can call or text **988** for support, information and available resources.

If you are concerned about their safety, you may need to take your loved one to an emergency room or call **911** for assistance.

Helping shows you care. There's no script or guaranteed outcome for helping someone who's experiencing mental distress. But sharing that you're concerned, being there to listen and offering support increases the chance they'll get support.

Even a simple conversation can make a real difference.  
We're here to help. Reach out 24/7/365.

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