



We all have mental health. Sometimes we might want to speak about a difficult time we are having and sometimes we might want to support someone else who is not feeling great.

Having these conversations is one way to help tackle stigma and discrimination. We can all find it difficult to speak out for fear of being judged, dismissed or treated differently, and it can be difficult to ask people how they are doing for fear of saying the wrong thing.

This resource is intended to make it feel a bit easier to ask someone how they are, and have a conversation on mental health, especially if you think they might be struggling. It also has tips if you want to open up a conversation on your own mental health.

You don't need to be an expert to talk to someone about mental health. Being open and supportive is more important than the exact words you use. It's okay to say you've noticed that someone doesn't quite seem themselves and ask if they would like to talk.

Confidentiality is important to most people and it can help to reassure someone that you won't be sharing the details of the conversation with others. But it's also essential to know that sometimes keeping confidentiality isn't possible and to be upfront about this.

If someone is at immediate risk of harm, sometimes it's important to pass on information to ensure they are kept safe. This might be to 101, 999 or it might be to someone within your organisation if it's at work.

If you're struggling with your mental health, then it is okay to ask someone to chat with you about how you're feeling.

Here are four steps to consider...

1. Is now a good time?

Conversations may be face-to-face, on the phone, via text or email.

Different things work for different people.

Time

Consider whether or not you are both able to have this conversation now. Give the other person the space to consider whether they can.

What if it's not a good time?

It might not be a good a time to have the conversation, for example you may not feel you are currently in the right headspace to talk to someone about how they are doing. Let them know you care but are unable to chat at the moment.

If you both want to, you could identify a better time to chat. You could also help them to think of someone else they could talk to if you feel up to it.

Place

For some, it can be useful to find a quiet space with no distractions. Others may find it easier to talk while also doing some sort of activity, like going for a walk or doing something creative.

What's needed?

Someone may need space to offload or vent; it could be that they are seeking some support.

Whatever they need, it's important that neither of you feels pressure to fix it or to have all of the answers.

2. How to begin

You've both decided it's a good time to have the conversation. Here are a few ideas around how to start.

It's okay to ask them how they are

If you feel you need to, you can ask more than once. It might be hard for them to open up about how they are feeling; asking twice shows the door is open.

Ways to ask if someone is okay

- "How are you doing?"
- "How have you been feeling?"
- "I'm here if you want to chat."
- "How's everything going?"

Ways to let someone know you need to talk

- "I'm not doing too well."
- "I need to talk."
- "It's not easy to talk about it."
- "I trust you."
- "Do you have some time to chat?"

3. Listening and responding

It can feel difficult to know the right things to say, but sometimes all someone needs is the space to be heard.

Listen without interruption

Try to really hear what the other person is saying and allow them space to share how they're really feeling. You can show that you are listening through your body language.

Reflecting back and showing you care can help

For example, acknowledging that it seems like a difficult time for them. Sometimes we can try to make others feel better by being overly positive, but that might not be helpful to everyone. You can respond using their words to show you are listening.

You might get emotional

Hearing what someone is experiencing may bring up a lot of different emotions as a listener. It's okay to feel

these emotions, but if you are able, try and judge whether showing them will be helpful to the other person.

Try not to minimise

Don't suggest things like 'everyone is feeling like this' or 'it could be worse'. You may say it to try and make them feel like it's not that bad, but minimising people's experiences can make them feel like their issues aren't important or worthy of sharing, which can stop people from asking for help.

Responding

It's okay to allow yourself time to process what they are saying and take your time to respond after they've shared. This might mean there are times of silence, and that's okay. You might not know exactly what to say, but you can let them know you are genuinely interested in what they are telling you. You might find it helpful to ask some open questions (not with a yes or no answer) to help them explore more about what's going on for them.

If you suspect that someone may be thinking about suicide, talk to them. Try to listen, be non-judgemental and do not criticise or blame the person. Letting them know you care, asking about their reasons for living and dying and really listening, trying to focus on their reasons for living in more detail, can help. Asking direct questions like, "Do you have a plan?" and "Are you thinking about suicide?" can help too. Asking about suicide can help the person talk about how they feel – it doesn't make them more likely to attempt suicide. If you're concerned someone has a plan to take their own life then please contact 999.

Sharing your own experience

Sometimes it may be useful to share experience of your own mental health. Try to do this sensitively so it doesn't then become the focus of the conversation – it might be worthwhile checking if the other person would find it helpful to hear your experience before sharing.

4. How are you both doing now?

After talking, it might be that you both need some more support. This could be looking for external help or taking some time to reflect on the conversation.

What would be helpful?

Asking them what they might need or find helpful next is a good question to ask. You don't need to have this information already – you can look for this together. It may be that they needed the space to talk about it and don't need support with next steps.

If urgent help is needed

You may become concerned about the other person's wellbeing. This could include finding out if they have made a plan to take their own life.

Asking about suicide won't encourage someone to do it. If you feel that someone is at immediate risk, call 999.

Reflecting

You can both take some time to check in with yourself after the conversation. How are you feeling? How do you think it went? Do you need some support?

What do you do next time you see them?

It might help the other person to know that the "door is open" to speak another time. Depending on the relationship you have with that person, you may want to organise another time to chat, but there shouldn't be any pressure on either of you to do so.

The next time you see them, they may not want to talk about their mental health – be led by them.

Need support?

Samaritans provide confidential, emotional support for anyone who is struggling to cope – 24 hours, 7 days a week. Call: **116 123** Text: **07725 909090**. Email: jo@samaritans.org www.samaritans.org

Breathing Space is a free, confidential phoneline service for any individual who is experiencing low mood and depression, or who is unusually worried and in need of someone to talk to. Call: **0800 83 85 87**

NHS 24 is a call centre operated by the NHS to provide patients with health advice over the phone.

Call **111**, or if you think you need an emergency ambulance, call **999** and speak to the operator.

Childline Scotland is a counselling service for children and young people. You can phone, send an email, or have a chat one-to-one. Call **0800 1111**. www.childline.org.uk

LGBT Health Helpline is open Tuesday and Wednesday (12-9pm) Thursday and Sunday (1-6pm). Call 0300 123 2523.