

How To Talk About Mental Health

Mental health can be difficult to talk about, but that doesn't mean we should ignore the topic. Instead, we can prepare ourselves with useful information to feel more confident about approaching others and supporting them when needed.

Choosing The Right Time and Place

It is important to remember that talking about mental health can be hard for both people, so you should first ensure you are in an environment where everyone feels safe and comfortable speaking openly.

- Ensure you have plenty of time so that you can comfortably have the conversation and not be in a rush to leave.
- You need to be in the right mindset yourself to be able to positively support the other person.
- Is the environment confidential? It is unlikely the other person will open up if other people can hear.
- You might want to 'walk and talk' as this can help people open up more compared to a face-to-face conversation.



Mental Health Conversation Starters

Starting the conversation can be the hardest part, so here are some conversation starters for you to use when trying to get someone to open up.

- “Are you ok?”... “How are you, really?”
- “I’ve noticed you haven’t been yourself recently, is everything ok?”
- “Is there anything you’d like to chat about? I’m always here to listen”
- “Would you like to go for a walk and talk?”
- “Have you been struggling with anything recently?”
- “Is there anything on your mind that you would like to talk about?”



Explorative Questions

Once you have started the conversation and someone opens up to you, it is important to know what to say next. You want to ask open-ended questions which allow the opportunity for the person to think and reflect on their situation; giving you better insight into their wellbeing and the severity of the situation. From here, you are then better equipped to support them.

- “How long have you been feeling this way?”
- “What do you think might have caused you to feel this way?”
- “Have you spoken to anyone else about this?”
- “Are you thinking about suicide?”
- “Is there anything else happening for you at the moment that you would like to talk about?”
- “Is there anything I can do to help you?”
- “What would make this situation better for you?”
- “What can we change that would make life better for you?”
- “What are you most looking forward to at the moment?”



Supportive Comments & Active Listening Signals

Remember, you are not expected to fix anything. Instead, you just need to show that you are listening and that you care. Here is how you can do this:

- Keep your body language open and non-confrontational.
- Show you are listening with eye contact, head nods and verbal utterances.
- Keep the tone of your voice soft and calm.
- Be patient, and let the other person know they have time e.g. “Take your time, there is no rush. I know it can be difficult to talk about this”.
- Use reassuring phrases like “Go on, I’m listening” or “Yes, I understand what you mean”.
- If you do not understand something, ask for clarification e.g. “I am not sure what you mean, please can you tell me more about it so I can understand better”.
- Paraphrasing what they have said back to them can also help to reinforce your interest and understanding.



Ending The Conversation & Next Steps

It can be hard to end the conversation, especially if you are worried about what they have shared or you are concerned for their welfare. Here are our top tips for ensuring the conversation ends positively for both people:

- If you think they are in immediate danger to themselves, call 999 or stay with them until they can seek medical assistance.
- Remind the other person you are there for them if they ever want to talk in the future.
- Signpost to professional support where necessary - you might find the [Everymind at Work Mental Health Support Directory](#) useful for this.
- Remind yourself that you are not responsible to 'fix' their problems, it is ok if you need to set personal boundaries.

