

The Dos and Don'ts of Talking About Mental Health

DO 	DON'T 
Start the conversation and ask questions	Avoid the conversation
Practice empathy and validate their feelings (e.g. "it sounds like you are having a really tough time")	Try to minimise what they are experiencing (e.g. "it could be worse")
Use words that show acceptance (e.g. "mental health is really important to all of us")	Use words that add to mental health stigma (e.g. crazy, nuts, psycho)
Acknowledge that each experience is unique (e.g. "tell me about your experience...")	Generalise an individuals experience (e.g. "everyone with depression feels that way")
Use humour if appropriate. This will help normalise what they are feeling and show acceptance	Use psychological terminology out of context (e.g. "schizophrenic weather")
Use terms that show the changing nature and experience of mental health issues (e.g. someone is "experiencing" a mental illness)	Use permanent and derogatory judgements (e.g. "they have always been mad" or "they are 'suffering' with a mental illness")
Recognise the individual as a whole person (e.g. a person who has "a diagnosis of" anorexia)	Label someone by their mental illness (e.g. "an anorexic")
Use the correct terms when discussing suicide (e.g. "took their own life", "ended their own life", "completed suicide")	Use the phrase "committed suicide" which refers to a time when suicide was considered a crime – which is no longer the case
Educate yourself on topics you do not understand	Pretend to have all the answers or offer solutions
Encourage them to seek professional help	Try to 'fix' them