

# How to start a conversation about mental health

## A GUIDE TO SPEAKING ABOUT A SENSITIVE TOPIC

It can be difficult for someone to talk about their struggles with mental health and addiction. But creating a judgement-free zone and initiating a supportive conversation may provide the encouragement they need to seek help.

The guidance of a mental health professional can greatly assist your ability to have meaningful and safe conversation. It is strongly advised that you seek professional consultation before initiating this discussion.

### 01 | When to start a conversation

While this checklist doesn't necessarily mean that someone is struggling with their mental health, it can act as a great indicator for when you should check in on your loved ones, friends or coworkers.



#### CHANGES IN APPEARANCE

- Bloodshot or glassy eyes
- Unprofessional appearance or poor hygiene
- Unexplained injuries such as cuts, bruises, scrapes or marks
- Dramatic weight loss or gain



#### CHANGES IN ENERGY LEVELS OR MOOD

- Exhaustion or fatigue
- Loss of interest in pleasures of life
- Unpredictable mood swings, irritability or aggression
- Inappropriate verbal or emotional responses and behaviours
- Relationship disharmony (e.g. how they speak about loved ones)



#### CHANGES IN FUNCTION

- Decline in effort or performance (e.g. increasingly ordering takeout or not cleaning their spaces)
- Noticeable errors in judgement
- Decline in punctuality
- Inexplicable absences in personal and work life



#### ARE YOU THE RIGHT PERSON TO START THIS CONVERSATION?

- You are trusted
- You can speak calmly and rationally
- You can avoid making accusations or judgements

### 02 | How to start the conversation

Once you've decided to have a conversation about mental health, you should consider how you will broach the topic. Firstly, try to find a quiet and private place to speak, and ensure that the person is not under the influence or in a manic state. Consider using or adapting the following phrases to begin the conversation.

- How have you been feeling lately? I've noticed that you've seemed (insert adjective: distant/overwhelmed/tired).
- Is there anything I can do for you right now? What do you think you need at this moment in time?
- What do you usually do to cope with stress? Have you found anything that works well for you?

### 03 | How to provide support

So you've started the conversation. What's next?

- Stay supportive. Listen and take them seriously.
- Stay in touch. Check in regularly and sensitively.
- Stay curious. Be tactful and compassionate when inquiring.
- Stay aware. Take note of helpful resources and offer to share them.
- Stay vigilant. If someone is talking about ending their life, this could be a medical emergency. Call 911 and stay calm until help arrives.

### 04 | Conversational Do's and Don'ts

Things to keep in mind during these tough conversations.

- DO**
- ✓ Listen and take their concerns seriously
  - ✓ Ask them what they need
  - ✓ Talk about options for support
  - ✓ Remain calm at all times

- DON'T**
- ✗ Judge or criticize
  - ✗ Worry about having all the answers
  - ✗ Force communication, lecture, or try to fix the problem
  - ✗ Use a confrontational approach to incite guilt or shame

