

Reaching Out for Help

It can be hard to talk about your mental health, particularly if you're struggling. But getting help by having a #RealConvo with someone in your life is a necessary step to take in feeling better. It's also a strong thing to do.

Here is some straightforward guidance for having a conversation that can make all the difference.

Getting the Conversation Started

The best way to broach the subject of your mental health with someone is to treat it as something important. (Because it is!) You might say:

"Hey, there's something I'd like to talk to you about. It's kind of important to me and I'm wondering if we can make some time."

Arrange a Time

If that moment isn't convenient for both of you, agree on a time.

"I'm wondering if you have a few minutes at lunchtime so that we can talk."

"Is there a good time I can call you this evening?"

Don't Give Up

Just because you're ready to have a conversation, it doesn't mean it will be convenient at that moment for the other person. This doesn't mean they don't care about you. Keep in mind that just as others may not realise what's going on with you, you also don't know what may be on their minds at the moment.

If the person you first contact isn't available, for whatever reason, try someone else. And keep in mind – especially if you're really struggling – that help is always available, even if you're not facing a serious or suicidal crisis.

Face to Face (or Ear to Ear)

Explain what it is you've been experiencing – changes in your thoughts, feelings, behaviours, sleep, energy and mood. You could tell them you've been feeling overwhelmed, anxious or depressed, or like your usual coping strategies hardly work any more. You could also tell them that you've been “not feeling like your usual self,” or that you're “having thoughts that are troubling to you.” (Keep in mind that it works both ways: just as situational stress can affect our mental health, sometimes our mental health can affect the way we are coping with a situation.)

So while you're explaining what's been going on in your life, make sure you identify any changes in your mental health that you're aware of, so your friend can understand the full picture. Talk about not just the things affecting you, but **how** they are affecting you. For example, instead of saying “Work has been really stressful because my boss does x, y, z...”, try to identify how the stress at work has been affecting your mood, anxiety, sleep, temper or frustration tolerance, substance use, and so on.

It's also helpful if you can look back and try to figure out how long the changes you've been experiencing have been going on. Did they happen gradually (over weeks to months), or more rapidly (hours to days)?

Bonus Round! You get extra marks if you can think about what tends to either help or worsen your mental health symptoms. This information will help your friend understand and support you, and together you might even be able to brainstorm some positive next steps to consider.

After the Convo

Now that you've opened yourself up in such a brave, strong way about what you're experiencing, you might be feeling a little nervous.

“What does this person think of me now?” “What if I've scared them away?” “Are they going to avoid me for now on?” Some people call this a Vulnerability Hangover.

What you might do, after the conversation has taken place, is to get back to them, thanking them for taking the time to talk, and letting them know, once again, how important the conversation was to you.

“Thank you for taking the time to talk to me the other day. It really was important to me to let you know how I was feeling.”

“I appreciate your friendship, and that you were willing to have such a personal conversation.”

Sometimes, no matter how willing a person is to have this kind of conversation, and no matter how much they care about you, they may be scared to get back to you, nervous about handling it in the right way. Getting back like this gives the other person an opportunity to continue the conversation with you, and lets them know you're not avoiding the topic yourself!

Congratulations! You've had a #RealConvo about your mental health!

In the same way you speak up about your physical health, talking about your mental health is a very necessary, and strong, thing to do. It's hard to experience mental health issues such as depression or anxiety. The good thing is, you never have to face anything alone.

Remember: help is always available.

