

Approaching a conversation

Spotting the signs of poor mental health

Some of the things you may notice about a friend that are concerning you:

- Withdrawing from your friendship group
- Changes in mood and behaviour
- Becoming more aggressive towards others
- Not communicating the way they normally do
- Eating more, eating less or comfort eating

Listen and give them your full attention

Offer reassurance that you are there to listen. Try not to be distracted with other things, it's important that they know you are dedicating your full attention to them. Let them know they have done the right thing by speaking to you.

If you don't know what to say, remember that you don't need to find an answer, or even understand their feelings. Listening will let them know you care.

Validate what they are saying

It can be hard sometimes to get out what we want to say. It can help if we are told our experiences and feelings are valid and by doing this your friend will know they are not alone. You can tell them that it's ok to be feeling the way they are.

Don't make assumptions as this may make your friend feel more uncomfortable and do encourage them to take their time. Everyone has had times when they have struggled with their mental health.

Give the conversation the time needed

It might be the first time that your friend has spoken to anyone about their mental health, and they may struggle. They might not go into much detail.

If your friend is struggling to express themselves, you can suggest they write it down or draw how they are feeling. This can help explain their feelings if talking is difficult.

What you can do to support your friend?

Ask your friend what they would like from you.

This is a good way to understand your friend's expectations. It also lets them know you are there to help and support. You could offer to help them get an appointment with their GP, speak with a trusted teacher at school or help them find support online and through helplines.

If you don't feel comfortable with something they are asking you to do, you can say that and tell them what you would be comfortable doing.



You don't need to have all the answers - if you don't know what to say or don't understand their situation and what they are going through, that's ok. Remember that you don't need to find an answer, or even understand their feelings. Allowing your friend the space and time to speak to you is already amazing.

Where you can, take action - share what you do know. If you have found a helpline or a website useful in the past, share that with your friend. You could go through the signposting document we've provided or a helpful website together.

Normalise things - it's good to remember that sometimes people can feel shy or embarrassed once they have had these conversations. So, it's important to continue doing things together, going to a café, a walk, shopping etc. This will help reassure them. Remember, just by being there for your friend, you are doing something great.

If you are worried about your friend, encourage them to speak to others - a trusted adult such as a teacher, a sports coach, or a youth worker. If you can, support them if they are worried about doing this by going with them or being there when they make a phone call.

Checking-in - a day or two after the conversation with your friend check-in and see how they are doing. This will let them know you are there to support them.

If they don't feel like talking, that's ok, it's important to respect their boundaries and give them the time they need.



Signposting

Learn more about mental health conditions

YoungMinds
85258 (text the word 'shout')



Student Minds
tel:+44-0808-808-4994



Mind
Support line:
0300 102 1234

