



STARTING THE CONVERSATION:

Family and Friends

Talking about mental health with a young person in your life may feel awkward. Still, these conversations should happen often. The more they happen, the easier they become. While getting started can be the hardest part, here are some tips to make it simpler.

Think about the setting

Some things to think about might be the time of day, place, and other worries like a big test or school event coming up. When might the person you're trying to connect with be most open to a chat? Also, when are you most focused and calm to listen and offer support as needed? Car rides, walks and other simple activities that don't need eye contact may be helpful settings.

Prompt

Starting the conversation can sometimes be hard. Think about starting with these phrases:

I have to ask you some personal questions, but if you don't want to talk, I understand.

You seem upset. I'm here to listen when you're ready to talk.

How have you been feeling lately?

What we talk about here today is private. I'm happy to listen, and I won't judge you.

Listen

Follow their lead. Give them a safe space to share and sort through their problems. Listen for chances to offer feedback and support. Don't downplay their feelings or experiences. Resist the urge to problem-solve. It's okay if there's silence. Sorting through big feelings and experiences is hard. Allow the space for this to happen.

Validate

Affirm their feelings. Ask if there's a way you can support them or if they are open to advice.

I'm sorry, that must have been very hard for you.

That's frustrating. I can see why it upsets you.

I'm happy to offer advice or just listen – whatever you need.

Questions

Keep questions open-ended and non-judgmental. Keep the conversation going with questions like "How did that make you feel?" or "What did you think about that?"

Keep in mind

A talk may be the first step. If a young person is going through mental health issues that may benefit from treatment or professional advice, talk to them about reaching out to a counselor, therapist or provider who can help.

If you're worried someone you care about may be having thoughts of suicide or considering harming themselves or others, don't wait. Get help right away. Call or text **988** for the **988** Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. You can also call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**.

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