

Helping others with mental health problems



If you know someone struggling with their mental health, there are lots of things you can do. Find out how you can help and support them.

Understanding how to help someone

About 1 in 4 people experience mental health problems each year. Most of us know a friend, colleague or family member who has struggled with their mental health.

We can all feel anxious, stressed or low at times in our lives. When these feelings go on for a long time, get worse or affect our day-to-day lives, they may be considered a problem.

If you know someone who is struggling to sleep or having issues with their mental health, there are lots of things you can do.

There are many ways you can help, it's important to remember that it may take time for someone's mental health to improve. And in some cases, they may need professional help. Even with professional support, help from friends or family will aid their recovery and support them into positive mental health and wellbeing in the future.

If the person you're worried about is a child, read [advice for parents and carers on the Young Minds website](#).

If the person you're worried about is a colleague or employee, or you want to learn more about how your workplace can support staff's mental health, [Mental Health at Work](#) can help you find the information and resources you need.

Why your support helps

Even though we're concerned, we might not know the best way to help. We worry about saying the wrong thing and making things worse.

For someone going through a difficult time, the small things friends, colleagues or family members say and do can make a real difference. Saying the words can be hard, but there are many ways to start these conversations.

You do not need to be an expert. Just recognising that a friend, colleague or family member is struggling is important.

People who have anxiety, depression and other mental health problems are often afraid to let others know or seek support, and connecting with others can make a big difference.

Depending on what their difficulties are, there are things you can do to make life better for someone. It could be making some time to cook for them, picking their kids up from school, or going for a coffee or a walk with them.

Mental health problems are more common than we realise, but fear often prevents us from being open about our difficulties.

Knowing more about mental health lets us break down these barriers and talk more openly.

When does someone need more help?

Someone may benefit from further support if they are experiencing mental health problems that do not go away, cause them distress and are affecting their day-to-day life.

You can still help by starting the conversation with them and seeing what more you can do. You can suggest that they talk to their GP or call NHS 111. Or, if they live in England, in most areas they could refer themselves directly for psychological therapy through their [local IAPT \(Improving Access to Psychological Therapies\) service](#).

Remember, you cannot force them, so talk to them about whether they would like your help with this.

It can be distressing to hear someone say they have thoughts that life's not worth living, or that they are self-harming or thinking about doing so.

Try to stay calm and assure them they do not need to deal with these difficult feelings alone. It's important they speak to someone, and being able to talk to you is an important step. Information on organisations who can help them right now is available on [our urgent support page](#).

Top things you can do to help

Express concern and say you can help

Letting someone know you're worried is a good way to open up a conversation – it shows you care about the person, have time for them and that they do not have to avoid things with you.

Reassure them

The first time someone mentions their worries is a big step. It's good to recognise this and reassure them. Let them know you're there to listen when they need to talk.

Offer your time to listen

Listening is an important skill. Ask open questions that start with "how", "what", "where" or "when". This can help people open up. [Listening tips from Samaritans](#)

Act as you usually do together

Do what you usually do – behaving differently can make someone feel more isolated. Do not be afraid to offer kind words and a space to talk, whether by phone, messaging or in person.

Be patient

You will not always know the full story. There may be reasons why they have found it difficult to ask for help. Just being there can be helpful for someone who may want to open up later.

If they do not want support

Gently explore their reasons for not wanting to get support. If they are unsure whether to get help, just talking and listening without judgement could help work out what's getting in the way.

Do not force it

Do not force someone to talk to you or get help, and do not go to a doctor on their behalf. This may lead to them feeling uncomfortable, with less power and less able to speak for themselves.

Look after yourself

It can be upsetting to hear someone you care about in distress. Be kind to yourself and take some time to relax or do something you enjoy.

Offer practical help

Little acts of kindness – like offering to do the shopping or to go to professional appointments with them – can help. Find out what works for them.