



## Talking with friends and family about mental health issues



### What can you do if someone you care about seems troubled, stressed out or just “not themselves”?

It can be hard to know when someone's struggling if they don't share. But certain changes in behavior can give you information about someone's mental state. You might notice certain posts on social media. Or observe a change in how they talk. What if it happens a lot or goes on for a long time? What if you feel truly concerned about a loved one's behavior, state of mind or well-being?

When a friend or loved one has mental or emotional distress, it can feel tricky to know what to say, how to say it and what to do next. At the same time, you may want to speak up out of concern and love — and to keep the person safe. Read on to learn how you can be both sensitive and helpful in such a situation.

### Recognizing symptoms of mental or emotional distress

The first step is to learn the signs of mental distress. Knowing these signs can give you more clarity about what you see, hear and experience. Some of the signs can include:

- Anxious, irritable or irrational behavior
- Mood swings
- Sleeping a lot or not at all
- Withdrawing from other people
- Not eating or eating a lot more than usual
- Trouble focusing on tasks
- Problems with memory
- Not washing, dressing or taking care of daily hygiene
- Acting paranoid or suspicious
- Hearing voices
- Thinking or talking about suicide



## When it's time to talk

Starting the conversation can be hard. The person you're worried about may not believe there's anything wrong. They may be frightened and confused.

So how can you approach the topic? First, reach out. Ask to talk. Then you can describe your observations. Let the person know you're concerned and you care.

Avoid comments that sound like accusations. Instead of saying "You've been acting strange," say what you've seen. Use "I" terms. For example, "I see that you're posting a lot about depression on social media lately" or "I've noticed you've been down for quite a while." Follow that by a sincere statement like, "I'm concerned about you."

## What to expect

Understand that there's no easy way to have this talk. You may be met with anger or denial. Try not to get upset, raise your voice or escalate the stress of the situation.

If you stay calm and assured, it may help your loved one hear you. Also, know that you may need to have this conversation more than once in order to make an impact. That is, unless you fear your loved one is unsafe — in which case you'll want to act right away.

## Ways to take action

If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide, get help right away by:

- Contacting your Employee Assistance Program for support and resources
- Calling **988** to get connected to a counselor at the **988** Suicide and Crisis Lifeline
- Going to the nearest emergency room or calling **911**

Suicide is one of the leading causes of death worldwide for all age groups.

## Helping shows you care

There's no script or guaranteed outcome for helping people who are experiencing mental distress. Remember they often feel tremendous emotional pain. They may be angry with you. They may not talk or act "like themselves."

But you can be yourself. You can learn more to increase your understanding of mental illness. You can be aware of signs and respond to situations that require intervention. You can be caring and effective.

You can make a difference.

**Get started today**