



Conversation Starters: Talking About Mental Health



Some of the most critical conversations in life are the hardest to have. Mental health can be one of those topics that can feel uncomfortable to talk about but has dire consequences if not addressed. This document contains helpful tips and phrases to kickstart a healthy, honest discussion about mental health-related concerns.

Setting the Stage

- Consider giving a preface to the conversation by explaining what you want to talk about. For ex., “I’d like to talk about my life lately. There have been a lot of things going on for me and I’d like to talk about how I’m doing managing it all,” or “I’d like to talk about how you’re doing. I know you’ve had a lot on your plate and I want to know how you’re coping and how I can help.” Be mindful, though, that some people- particularly if they suffer from anxiety- will struggle with too much advance notice, so you’re better off telling them closer to when the actual conversation will be taking place.
- Choose a place that feels safe and comfortable and private, ideally with enough space to pause and take a break as needed. If you’re talking about someone else’s mental health issues, put the power in that person’s hands by asking where he/she would prefer to go.
- Conduct the conversation during calm, neutral time, when everyone involved is in a (relatively) stable mood.
- Come prepared with resources as needed (phone, books, pamphlets, tissues, etc.).
- Consider if anyone else can/should be involved in the conversation as a support.



Example of Helpful Phrases

TO STATE YOUR PURPOSE

"I've been struggling and I'd really love your advice."

"I haven't been myself lately and I need help."

"I've been feeling really down and I don't even know what I need but I was hoping I could talk it through with you."

"My anxiety has been so high lately and I think it'd help me to talk about it with you."

"I've noticed that you haven't been yourself lately and wanted to check in."

"I've noticed you seem really tired and haven't been as active. I know you've talked before about your depression and wanted to see how you're feeling."

"Is anything going on?"

"What's been happening for you lately?"

TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE AWKWARDNESS AND PUSH THROUGH IT

"I feel uncomfortable talking about this but I think it's really important and we'll feel better about it if we do."

"I'm not even sure of the right things to say but I was hoping you could hear me out."



TO SUGGEST WAYS TO HELP

"I would like to get help but I don't know where to begin. I was hoping you could help me find some resources."

"I want to make an appointment with my therapist but I'm finding it so uncomfortable. Could you sit with me while I call?"

"You've told me that your depression gets worse in the wintertime. I care about you and want to support you. How can I help?"

"From what I'm hearing you say, you'd like to get more help but feel like it's hard to get started. Would you like me to **research the names of mental health providers/[or other idea of way to help]** or would you like me to **drive you to your appointment/[other option for help]?"**

TO TALK TO KIDS

"You may have noticed that I have been crying and sleeping a lot lately, and maybe it's been worrying you. I have an illness, that's kind of like a sickness you can get in your body, called depression. A lot of people have this. You can talk to me about it anytime."

"My worries sometimes get too big, but I want you to know that it has nothing to do with you, that I love you no matter what, and that I have medicine I take that helps me with this. I am taking care of myself."

"I have been short with you lately and yelling more than usual. Sometimes my mind gets overwhelmed with big feelings and I don't use my thinking brain. I am sorry I've been acting that way; it is not your fault and I am going to work on the way I talk to you. You can tell me if I ever upset you."

