THE CATALYST

# 5 Tips for Starting a Conversation with Your Friend About Mental Health

*It can be challenging to talk about mental health with friends and loved ones, as there is often a fear of being judged or misunderstood. In this post, I will share five tips for starting a conversation with your friend about their mental health.*

By: Nicole Chevrier | Posted: May 25, 2023

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## Why it's important to have conversations about mental health

Before we dive into the tips, let's take a moment to discuss why it's important to talk about mental health. Mental health issues are incredibly common, yet they are still heavily stigmatized in our society. Those who struggle with mental health often feel isolated and alone, which can aggravate their symptoms and lead to a worsening of their condition. By having open and honest conversations about mental health, we can help break down the stigma and create a more supportive and understanding environment. But the question is, how do you know when a friend is struggling with their mental health?

## The signs that someone might be struggling with their mental health

### Changes in behaviour

- No longer participating in activities they once enjoyed
- Isolating themselves from friends and family, and communicating less than normal
- Change in appetite
- Sleeping more and still feeling tired
- Increased use of substances
- Changes in care of personal appearance or living space
- Being less productive at work or school
- Posting worrying messages on social media

### Changes in mood

- Significant changes in mood, from very high to very low
- Overreacting to situations
- Sounding hopeless
- Feeling anxious, or worrying more

**Changes in what they say to you or others**

- “I hate myself.”
- “I’m messing up everything in my life.”
- “What’s the point?”

# Common barriers to talking about mental health

There are many reasons why people might be hesitant to talk about mental health. Some common barriers include:

## Stigma

As I mentioned earlier, mental health issues are still heavily stigmatized in our society. This can make it difficult for people to open up about their struggles, as they may fear being judged or misunderstood.

## Lack of knowledge

Many people simply don’t know enough about mental health to feel comfortable discussing it. They may not know the right words to use or the best way to approach the topic.

## Fear of making things worse

Some people may worry that bringing up mental health will only make things worse for their friend. They may feel like they don’t have the skills or knowledge to offer the right kind of support.

Now that we’ve talked about why it’s important to have conversations about mental health and some common barriers to doing so, let’s dive into some tips for starting the conversation.

## 1. Choose the right time and place

It’s important to choose a time and place where your friend feels comfortable and safe. You want to make sure they have your full attention and that there are no distractions that might make them feel uncomfortable or vulnerable. It’s also a good idea to choose a time when you both have plenty of time to talk, so you don’t feel rushed or interrupted.

## 2. Use open-ended questions

When you’re starting the conversation, it’s important to use open-ended questions that encourage your friend to share more about their experiences. For example, you might ask, “How have you been feeling lately?” or “Can you tell me more about what’s been going on for you?” This can help your friend feel like you’re genuinely interested in hearing about their experiences, rather than just trying to get them to open up.

## 3. Be non-judgmental

It’s important to approach the conversation with an open mind and a non-judgmental attitude. Your friend may be hesitant to share their experiences if they feel like they’ll be judged or criticized. Instead, try to listen actively and offer support without trying to “fix” their problems.

## 4. Share your own experiences

If you’ve struggled with mental health in the past, it can be helpful to share your own experiences with your friend. This can help them feel less alone and more understood. However, be careful not to make the conversation all about you – remember that the focus should be on your friend’s experiences and needs.

## 5. Offer ongoing support

After the conversation is over, it’s important to offer ongoing support to your friend. Let them know that you’re there for them and that you care about their well-being. Check in with them regularly and offer to help them find professional support if needed.

Starting the conversation is just the first step – it’s also important to know how to continue the conversation and offer ongoing support to your friend. Here are some tips:

## Be patient

Remember that your friend may not be comfortable opening up right away. It’s important to be patient and give them space to share at their own pace.

## Validate their experiences

It’s important to validate your friend’s experiences and let them know that their feelings are valid and important. This can help them feel more comfortable opening up in the future.

## Help them find professional support

If your friend is struggling with mental health issues, it’s important to help them find professional support. This might mean helping them find a therapist or a support group, or even just encouraging them to talk to their doctor.

Talking about mental health can be difficult, but it’s crucial for both your own well-being and that of your loved ones. By following these five tips, you can start the conversation and offer ongoing support to your friend. Remember to approach the conversation with an open mind and a non-judgmental attitude, and to offer ongoing support even after the conversation is over. Together, we can break down the stigma surrounding mental health and create a more supportive and understanding environment for all.

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An avid writer and photographer. A first-time author, she recently published her first children’s book to help children who are experiencing bullying. When she isn’t at her desk, Nicole loves to spend her time doing yoga and meditation, ballroom dancing, hiking, and celebrating nature with photography. She is a collector of sunset moments.

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