

Tips: How do I start?

When someone you care about is hurting, it's natural to want to help them. But, that person might not always tell you something is wrong—and you might be unsure about how to reach out. Consider these tips to get started.

Create a judgment-free zone. Ask questions like, "How are you feeling?"

Expect each person to respond differently. Let them respond and talk as much—or as little—as they need.

Let them set the pace.

Use open ended questions that encourage conversations instead of drilling them with back-to-back questions.

Am I taking it personally?

Remember, mental health is a continuum with bad days and good days. Be understanding.

Do I accept when things are challenging for them?

Be patient and don't hold their bad days against them.

Create a safe space.

Let them know their answers won't change what you think about them.

Show you're ready to listen.

Don't start a conversation while you're distracted. Give your full attention.



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Am I expecting their illness will be fixed and disappear?

Reflect on your expectations for them to be “cured.”

Check your body language.

Keep a comfortable distance. Consider sitting next to them rather than in front. Be mindful of your hands, and try to keep them where they can see them.

Choose a moment that works for them.

Send messages or suggest meeting times when it best fits their schedule.

Consider sending a text.

It's OK to start the conversation with a text message. Make sure to follow up and offer other places to talk.

Choose locations that work for them.

Recognize the pandemic may affect where people are comfortable meeting for a long time to come. Going outside or online may work well.

