



So much has changed in our home and work lives over the past few years. Many of those changes have impacted our mental health and well-being, and unfortunately, a lot of us prefer to keep our struggles to ourselves.

Hesitating to talk about mental health only promotes the stigma that it's a taboo topic. Normalizing conversations about mental health gives us, and our colleagues, the confidence to speak up and get the help we need.

Here are a few tips to help guide your next conversation about mental health.

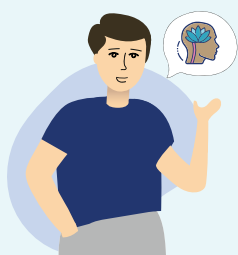
What to Avoid:

Listening can be one of the most powerful ways to support someone facing mental health challenges. However, it's important to stay away from judgement, pity and dismissiveness. The following are communication blockers¹ we should avoid:

- **Making assumptions:** "I know that happens to people like you a lot."
- **Lecturing, judging or criticizing:** "You never should have been in that situation." "You thought that was a good idea?"
- **Analyzing:** "I don't think that's really what you mean."
- **Deflecting and dismissing:** "Come on, it's not that big of a deal. You can bounce back!"

What to Do:

Now that we're aware of things to avoid, here are seven ways you can show empathy¹ and support during a mental health conversation²:



1. Be willing to connect in a meaningful way:

- Make time to engage with others.
- Be open to sharing about your own mental health.
- Be present and attentive during the conversation.



2. Use open-ended questions as great conversation starters:

- "What's on your mind recently?"
- "How is your day going?"
- "How have you been sleeping?"



3. Keep the conversation going, with prompts:

- “How are you feeling about _____?”
- “Where do you think that is coming from?”
- “What do you think could be your next move?”



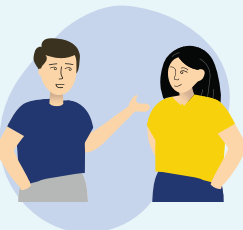
4. Show empathy if someone is hurting:

- “I’m sorry you’re going through this. What are you doing to cope?”
- “I’m here for you. What other support do you have?”
- “This must be hard for you. How have you dealt with this, or something like this, before?”



5. Consider sharing available resources:

- “I know you’re struggling, and it may be really helpful for you to talk to a professional who can help you get through this.”
- Depending on the situation, consider sharing that they can call or text 988 to reach the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, a national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24/7.



6. Express gratitude for the time to connect:

- Tell the person you’re glad you were able to talk on a deeper level.
- Reassure them that it’s okay to talk and that an honest conversation is a major step to getting support.



7. Follow-up with them:

- Let them know you have been thinking about them since your last conversation and are available if they want to talk.
- Check-in to see how they’re feeling since the last conversation.

Real Story

I found that asking friends and coworkers “How are you doing?” usually just resulted in a quick “Good” or “I’m fine”. When I started asking the people in my life “**How are you really doing?**” I was amazed by how much they were hiding or simply coping with on their own. Having authentic conversations has really helped me see that I wasn’t alone in my struggles and has helped me form even stronger bonds with the people in my life.

– Balance participant

Starting real conversations about mental health is a great way to show support to the people we care about in our lives. Let’s aim to be the strong, not silent type! We can all start small with intentional and authentic conversations.

References:

1. JHU Student Well-Being: <https://wellbeing.jhu.edu/blog/2020/10/01/how-to-be-an-active-and-empathetic-listener/>
2. JHM Office of Well-Being: https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/office-of-well-being/resources/docs.html/Mental_Health_Talking_Points.pdf