



HOW TO TALK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH AND OFFER SUPPORT

Did you know that men are less likely than women to seek help for depression, substance use or stressful life events? Studies show that there are seven key themes in the barriers that prevent men from seeking help: acceptance from peers, personal challenges, cultural and environmental influences, self-medicating with alcohol, perspectives around seeking professional help, fear of homophobic responses, and traditional masculine ideals.

This means if you have a male friend or family member who struggling, he may not ask for help. It might be incumbent on you to start the conversation and offer support. Starting a conversation about mental health can be difficult. Here are some helpful tips.

1. PREPARE FOR THE CONVERSATION

- ✦ Find a time and place to talk. Make sure to give you both plenty of time to have a good conversation and it's in a place you both feel safe.
 - ✦ Having the conversation outside can be a good idea.
 - ✦ Some men find it easier to talk when they are doing something. So instead of sitting face-to-face, maybe have the conversation while playing video games or engaging in physical activity like a walk or sport.
 - ✦ It's ok to have the conversation online or via text if you know your friend is responsive and generally enjoys that means of communication.
- ✦ Make sure you are in a good state of mind before you begin the conversation.
- ✦ Be yourself.
- ✦ Prepare yourself for your friend to not want to talk. That's ok. Don't push. Sometimes just the offer to talk is the first step.

“If you recognize a symptom, change in behavior, or think something isn't right, don't rationalize the behavior or downplay the symptom. Make sure you take everything seriously and engage in a conversation, checking in about whatever it is you notice. Helping a brother out is as simple as asking him a question.”

- Liz Brown,
Senior Consultant, Research, EAB





2. START THE CONVERSATION

- Try leading with these questions as you begin the conversation.
 - “I’ve been worried about you. Can we talk about what you are experiencing? If not, who are you comfortable talking to?”
 - “What can I do to help you to talk about issues with your parents or someone else who is responsible and cares about you?”
 - “What else can I help you with?”
 - “I am someone who cares and wants to listen. What do you want me to know about how you are feeling?”
 - “Who or what has helped you deal with similar issues in the past?”
 - “Sometimes talking to someone who has dealt with a similar experience helps. Do you know of others who have experienced these types of problems who you can talk with?”
 - “It seems like you are going through a difficult time. How can I help you to find help?”
 - “How can I help you find more information about mental health problems?”
 - “I’m concerned about your safety. Have you thought about harming yourself or others?”
- Communicate in a straightforward manner.
- Speak at a level appropriate to a person’s age and development level.
- Watch for reactions during the discussion and slow down or back up if your friend becomes confused or looks upset.

3. LISTEN

The most important thing you can do is listen and let them know you hear what they are saying.

- Don’t interrupt. Let them say what they want to say.
- Don’t try to diagnose their problems, offer solutions or give advice unless asked. This may seem counter-intuitive, but it’s important to let them tell their story.
- Don’t diminish or dismiss what they are feeling.
- Show signs of encouragement by nodding, asking open-ended questions or to elaborate on what they’ve said.

4. ENCOURAGE ACTION

Acknowledge you don’t have all the answers, but you can help explore some options. Options can include:

- Seeking out a hobby or activity they enjoy
- Encouraging them to talk to others close to them
- Directing them to online resources or resources on campus
- Encouraging them to see a doctor or other professional, if necessary

5. CHECK IN

It’s not enough to have one conversation. Check in with your friend or family member to keep track of where they are at and help them make/stick to a plan. This will help them know you are there for them and truly care about their wellbeing.

**Information from:*

<http://www.mentalhealth.gov/talk/friends-family-members>

<https://us.movember.com/mens-health/we-need-to-ask>

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1557988315619469>