#RealConvo Guide

How to Start (and Continue!) a Conversation About Mental Health

You don't need special training to have an open, authentic conversation about mental health – and often, just talking about it can be the first important step in understanding where someone is with their mental health, and helping them get support or treatment if needed.

Here are some quick pointers you can use for having a #RealConvo with the people in your life.

1. Let people know you're willing to talk about #MentalHealth

The easiest way to let people know you're willing to talk about mental health is to be open about your own. Try to think of it in the same way you think about your physical health. Allow it to come up naturally in conversation in the same way.

If you've seen a mental health professional in the past, when the subject comes up, you might say, in your own words:

"I've had times in my life when I've struggled. I went to talk to someone, and it really helped me."

A casual reference like the one above can have a powerful effect, letting others know you're a safe person to talk to if they ever need to reach out.

2. What can you say to someone you think may be struggling?

Trust your gut if you think someone's having a hard time, and speak to them privately. Start with an expression of care, followed by an observation.

"I care about you and I've noticed you haven't been yourself lately. You seem more frustrated than you've been in a while, and I'm wondering how you're doing."

Normalize mental health by talking about it directly.

"I wonder if what's happening at work these days is stressing you out."

"With everything that's going on in your family, I wonder if you're feeling overwhelmed."

Let them know you get it, and that it's okay – and normal – to struggle in response to life's challenges.

"I've been through things in my life, too, and what I've often found is that talking about it helps. Whatever it is, I'm here to listen and support you."

3. The timing doesn't have to be perfect

You may not always be able to speak with someone the moment you notice they might be struggling. It's fine to circle back some other time soon.

"The other day I noticed you seemed upset. I made a note that I wanted to talk with you. I'm really concerned about how you're doing. So let's talk."

Sometimes creating some space is the perfect thing to do. Let them know you can have the conversation at a time that's right for them.

"Can we grab some coffee and talk about it?"

"Would you like to go for a walk?"

4. What if they hesitate?

The other person might worry that sharing how they feel will be a burden to others. They might say something like, "You must be sick of hearing about all of this," or, "I don't want to saddle you with my problems."

In your own words, tell them:

"Not only am I not sick of it, but I care about you, so I want to be there for you. I get that life is complex – so I'm here to listen and support you."

5. Would they be more comfortable talking to someone else?

If you suspect the other person might be more comfortable talking with someone else, you can offer to help connect them.

"Is talking to me about this helping you right now? Or is there someone else you'd feel more comfortable with, who we can bring in to help support you?"

6. What if they tell you they really are having a hard time?

Reassure them that it's okay to talk about.

"You know what? Everyone goes through periods in their life when they're struggling. But just because you're struggling now doesn't mean you'll always feel this way."

Then ask for more detail, and let them know they can go to that dark place with you.

"What's the worst thing about what you're going through right now?"

And make sure to include that getting help from a mental health professional can truly make a big difference in their situation.

7. When the convo's winding down...

End the conversation by reiterating that you are so glad for the chance to connect on this deeper level about such meaningful things in life. Remind them that we all have challenges at times, and that you'll continue to be there for them.

Nicely done! You've had a #RealConvo about mental health! How do you follow up?

Give yourself a pat on the back for having a #RealConvo with someone!

But don't just leave it at that. Follow up to let them know it was okay to open up, that you care, and that you're still a "safe" person to talk to about mental health.

"You know, you've been on my mind since we had that conversation the other day."

"I've really been thinking about what we talked about, and I want to circle back. How're you feeling since we spoke?"

Being available to have a #RealConvo about mental health is an important way we can all be there for the people in our lives, whether it's a friend, family member, or someone in your community. All it takes is a willingness to be open, honest and present with the people you care about.

We all have mental health. Reach out and have a #RealConvo with someone in your life today.