



# HOW TO HELP SOMEONE IN EMOTIONAL DISTRESS.

What to say and what to do.

**When someone is in emotional distress, having supportive friends and family around can make all the difference.**

When a friend or relative is experiencing a mental health issue, it's not easy to know how to give them the support they need. You can start by engaging in genuine, compassionate conversation. It may feel uncomfortable at first, so here are some tips that may help.



## **Be sensitive to the need for privacy.**

Talk in a private and safe setting. No matter how the conversation starts, remember that this is a deeply personal topic.



## **Don't try to minimize the person's concerns.**

Avoid saying things such as, "It can't be that bad." Just listen and be empathetic, without feeling like you have to fix anything. Watch for reactions, and slow down or back up if the person looks confused or upset.



## **Show compassion.**

Let the person know you care and that they're valued. Ask how you can help or if there's anything that they need from you. Check in with them from time to time, offer to share a meal or help with the laundry. It's not necessarily about what you say – it's about being there for them, and truly listening.



## **Be yourself.**

Use words that you feel comfortable with and that make sense given the situation and your relationship. Be honest and nonjudgmental. Sharing your observations can make them feel like they matter to you.

**Together, all the way.®**





## Starting a conversation.

It's hard to know what to say to someone who's going through a tough emotional time.

### Here are some encouraging words to keep in mind.

- › I feel like you haven't been yourself lately. I am concerned about you. Can we talk?
- › I want to respect your privacy, but I'm worried about you.
- › I know you've been having a tough time recently. Let's talk about what's been going on.
- › I can tell something's wrong. Can you tell me how I can help?

### Phrases you could use.

- › I'm here for you. You don't have to feel alone.
- › I may not know exactly how you feel, but you matter to me and I want to help.
- › I know it doesn't seem like it now, but you won't always feel like this. Things will change.

### When in doubt, get professional help.

Remind your friend or family member that help is available. Mental health problems can be treated. If it's a coworker, you could ask your Human Resources representative if your company has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or other resource they'd recommend. Their health plan might also be able to help in finding a mental health professional for a face-to-face visit. You could even offer to make an appointment for them and take them to it.

**Source:** U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

"For Friends and Family Members."

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

(last updated September 26, 2017).



**Seek emergency treatment immediately if you or someone you know has suicidal thoughts or behaviors.**

If there is any concern about suicide, **call 911** or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **800.273.8255**.



This is general health information and not medical advice or services. Always consult with your doctor for appropriate examinations, treatment, testing and health care recommendations.

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