

Create a safe, open space with no distractions

Conversations about mental health can be difficult to have. They are especially difficult if the person you are talking to does not feel safe. If you want to bring up a difficult topic, make sure that you are somewhere the person feels comfortable. Make sure they are comfortable with you – are you someone they can rely on?



Listen carefully and be accepting of their feelings

Regardless of what the person says to you, accept that it is what they are experiencing and that this is valid. Even if you see something very differently to them, their position is just as valuable as yours is. You may find it helpful to repeat what they have said back to them to ensure you have understood.



Be empathic and don't jump in with solutions

Be with them in their emotions. Let their feelings affect you and reflect back to them how it feels to hear them talk. For example:

- "Wow, the way you just talked about yourself made me feel really sad."
- "When you said that, it made my heart drop a little bit. It must be so difficult for you to feel that way."



Be curious and keep questions open ended

Be interested in how it must feel to be in the person's shoes. Try to make best guesses, but be tentative as you are exploring possibilities. This way, you can both think together about what may be going on. For example:

- "I wonder whether when I said ..., it made you a little bit ...?"
- "I might be getting this wrong... but..."



Be playful

These conversations can be quite heavy, and can easily become distressing. Take time to notice moments where you can lighten the mood slightly. This does not have to detract from the seriousness of the topic, but can help the conversation to be more collaborative.



Try to Avoid

1. Having the conversation unless you feel you can empathise/be caring towards the person
2. Suggesting what you would do if you were them
3. Making them explain *WHY* they feel how they do
4. Comparing their experiences to other people
5. Interrupting them/making assumptions

