Talking about mental health

How to start a conversation about mental health with another adult

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It can sometimes be really difficult to talk about your feelings with friends, family, or colleagues. It's common to feel worried about upsetting people you care about, and feel nervous about what people will think, or how it might affect your relationships. But the people closest to us can often be a valuable source of support.

Whenever you feel ready, these tips might help you start the conversation:

Find a method of communication that feels right for you. This might be a face-to-face conversation, or you might find it easier to talk on the phone or write down how you feel in a letter.

Find a suitable time and place There may not be a 'good' time, but it can help if you're somewhere quiet and comfortable, and are unlikely to be disturbed for a while.

Practice what you want to say You could do this in your head or make some notes. Phrases such as "I've not been feeling like myself lately" or "I'm finding it hard to cope at the moment" might provide a starting point.

And here are some tips for while having the conversation:

Offer them relevant information and examples If you've found a useful description in a book or online, or seen someone on television or in a film saying something that feels right to you, you could use this to help explain what you're experiencing.

Be honest and open It can sometimes feel uncomfortable sharing something so personal, but explaining how your feelings are affecting your life may help others to understand.

Suggest things they could do to help This might just be listening and offering emotional support – or there may be practical help you need.

Don't expect too much from one conversation. Understanding mental health problems can take time, and some people may be shocked or react badly at first. It's important to give them some time to process what you've told them. But if possible, plan to come back to the conversation with them again, to give you more opportunities to explain what you're going through.

Support

For support with your own mental health, there are many places you can find help:

- for more support and information about mental health, visit Mind online (mind.org.uk).
- for more information about talking to your friends about your mental health, visit the Mental Health Foundation website (mentalhealth.org.uk).
- the Time to Change website also has some videos of people sharing their experiences about opening up (time-to-change.org.uk).

mind.org.uk

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