

The logo for Mental Health UK is contained within a white-outlined arrow shape pointing to the right. The text "Mental Health UK" is written in a white, sans-serif font, stacked vertically inside the arrow.

Mental
Health
UK

Conversation Guide:

Talking to someone about
mental health.

Spotting the signs of poor mental
health - notice the changes

Physical symptoms

- Headaches
- Muscle tension/
back ache
- Tight jaw/
grinding teeth
- Raised heart rate/
faster breathing
- Changes in appetite
- Stomach problems
- Difficulty sleeping

Behavioural symptoms

- Avoiding and blaming others
- Eating more, eating less or comfort eating
- Using alcohol, substances or smoking
- Snapping at others
- Becoming more accident prone
- Biting nails
- Self-harm

Emotional symptoms

- Irritable
- Frightened
- Worried/anxious
- Angry
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Fear
- Shame



Cognitive symptoms

- Worrying about the past or future
- Racing thoughts
- Panic attacks
- Problems concentrating
- Memory lapses/ forgetting things
- Difficulty making decisions
- Unable to think clearly

Dos and don'ts to having a supportive conversation

Do choose the right environment

Consider who else is around and can potentially overhear the conversation – if on the phone or online, could you use headphones to allow for greater privacy? Ask them: where would you like to talk?

Do give your full attention and listen without judgement

Offer reassurance that you are there to listen. Try not

to multitask, it's important to convey that you are dedicating your full attention to the conversation.

Do ask open questions

Ask them “How are you today?” or “I’ve noticed you haven’t seemed yourself lately, how are you feeling?” – Sometimes making it about the present can prevent the ubiquitous “I’m fine” response.

Don't assume you know the answers

You're not expected to be an expert. If you don't know what to say, remember that you don't need to find an answer, or even understand their feelings. Listening will let them know you care.

Don't challenge, ignore or invalidate

Don't silver-line situations or try to make the person feel better. If someone says they feel worthless and

we respond, "No you're not, don't be silly" we are invalidating what they have said.

Don't compare

Sometimes we can draw up a story comparing their situation to someone else's or your own.

In some instances, this can show empathy, but it can also sometimes turn into you telling your story rather than listening to them.

Do reflect back and clarify

If someone says something that isn't clear and you don't know what they meant, repeat back what they have said and ask them to explain. Don't put words in their mouth.

Do show empathy rather than sympathy

Empathic responses show that you're trying to see where the person

is coming from. Sympathy usually expresses pity, so say something like "That must be awful, I'm so sorry." Instead of "I'm sorry for you"

Do empower the person

Ask: "What do you think would help?" rather than tell them what you think would help. Give information rather than advice. This makes it empowering.

Don't try to find an easy solution

What would help someone or what they want to happen will be different for everyone so don't try to 'fix' or give advice as your first response.

Don't diagnose

You are not in a position to diagnose a mental illness. This is not your role, even if you've gone through something similar yourself.



Signposting

**Learn
more about
mental health
conditions**



As a first point of call, GPs are the main gateway to further support. Let them know that they can book a double appointment with their GP to discuss their mental health, so they don't feel rushed. They can request for a family member or friend to attend the appointment with them.

**Find out
more**



CLICK ME

You could suggest our
online community Clic.
It's monitored 24/7,
so it's a great way for
people to connect with
others and get peer
support.

**Join Clic
for free**



CLICK ME

To find support in your local area, or if you or someone is experiencing a crisis, visit

www.mentalhealth-uk.org/support-and-services/

© Mental Health UK,
London, SE1 7TP.
Registered Charity
Number: 1170815



**Find
support**

