

*Providing the Irish community with information, resources, and opportunities to talk about mental health.*

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## Having a Conversation about Mental Health

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### Things to Know

Because of the shame and stigma that persist around mental illness we sometimes avoid talking to friends and family about mental health concerns. If you're struggling to know how to start this kind of conversation, remember the following;

- You don't need to be an expert on mental health to have a conversation about it. Don't let a lack of medical or technical knowledge prevent you from having that important conversation.
- Have realistic expectations of yourself - it's very unlikely that you alone can resolve another person's mental health issues and that's okay.
- Don't underestimate how impactful a simple conversation can be for those experiencing a mental health issue.
- Thinking of mental health issues as a weakness or something to be ashamed of is a trap. It keeps us from connecting to one another in a meaningful way when that's what we need the most. Don't let your own negative perceptions of mental illness stop you from offering support.
- Don't worry that you won't know what to do if someone tells you they're struggling with mental health issues - listening in a supportive way and offering your help is the most important thing you can do.
- Asking someone if they're thinking of suicide won't make them more likely to do it.

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### Be Prepared

Whenever possible, be ready for a conversation about mental health by doing a little prep work.

- Pick a time and place that's conducive to conversation - allow plenty of time in a setting that's free from interruptions. Talking during an activity like driving, golfing or cooking can help create a more casual, open conversation.
- If possible, do some research so you can have contact information for support services on hand to share (see reverse).
- Practice how you might start the conversation or some helpful questions you could ask.

### Dos and Don'ts

#### DO

- Remember they may not be ready to talk - if so leave the door open for future conversations by letting them know you're there for them.
- Listen carefully and be non-judgmental.
- Remind them how common mental health issues are.
- Remain calm and patient - speak slowly.
- Share your concerns and observations.
- Ask if there's anything specific you can do to help.
- Provide contact information for support services.

#### DONT

- Don't minimize their experiences or feelings
- Don't use terms that are hostile or shaming.
- Don't assume anything about their situation - listen
- Don't push them if they are upset or confused - let them set the pace; you can always try again .
- Don't let your own discomfort determine the conversation - ask the difficult questions, leave room for silence, don't shut down the conversation prematurely.

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### Helpful Questions

- I'm worried about you. Tell me how you're doing?
- I care about you and I want to know if your having a hard time. Maybe I can help?
- Can I help you find mental health supports?
- Can I help you make an appointment/call?
- How can I best support you right now?

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### After You've Talked

- Don't treat the person differently than you did before you chatted about their mental health.
- Check-in with them again in the near future.
- Be reliable - if you agreed to something during the conversation be sure to follow through.
- Find out more about the mental health issues raised during your conversation by contacting support organizations or researching online.