

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 EMPOWER THE PERSON

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.