
HOW TO TALK TO PEERS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

EXPERIENCING DIFFERENT EMOTIONS IS COMPLETELY NORMAL AND IT IS A PART OF LIFE. FEELING LOW OR HAVING A BAD DAY AT TIMES CAN BE A NATURAL RESPONSE TO WHAT'S HAPPENING AROUND YOU. HOWEVER, IF THE FEELING OF SADNESS PERSISTS OVER A LONGER PERIOD OF TIME MAKING EVERYDAY LIFE DIFFICULT, IT COULD INDICATE A MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM. FRIENDS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE LIFE OF ADOLESCENTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS AND THEY CAN HELP TO IMPROVE THE OUTCOMES.

Has someone you know been acting different lately? The following are signs you should look out for:

- ✂ **Lack of engagement:** they lost interest in the activities they used to enjoy.
- ✂ **Change in communication pattern:** they stopped talking to you or other friends.
- ✂ **Changes in hygiene and sleeping patterns:** their appearance does not seem to be a priority.
- ✂ **Displays of sadness or anger:** they struggle to control strong emotions. They may either get anger outbursts or they may seem to be more down than usual.
- ✂ **Withdrawal from social activities:** they started withdrawing themselves from social activities that they once used to attend.

If you have noticed that the person displays some of these signs, it may indicate that he might be going through a difficult time. How do you talk to them about it?

- ✂ **Reach out to them:** reach out to them and ask them if they are okay. It is best to use the "I" statements when approaching your friend. For example, you can say: "I've missed hanging out with you, is everything okay?"
 - ✂ **Listen to what they have to say:** keep eye contact, be empathetic and acknowledge how they feel. If you have experienced mental illness, sharing this information can strengthen the trust between you and your friend.
 - ✂ **Encourage them to open up about their problems:** encourage your friend to take action and talk to his family or school counsellor. Early detection and intervention is the first step towards recovery.
 - ✂ **Check on them:** let them know that you are there to help and that they can talk to you. Don't give up if they brush you off the first time. They might not be ready to talk about what they are going through and that's okay. Be supportive by making it clear that they can talk to you when they are ready to reach out.
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