

## COMMUNICATION & ACTIVE LISTENING TIPS • ARE YOU OK?

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Talking to someone who is struggling and trying to find the right words can feel overwhelming. If you're worried about someone in distress, it's important to know how to offer your support and make it safe for the other person to share. Take the lead, and ask: "Are you OK?". Put away your cell phone & make it clear you are available.

### YOUR WORDS MATTER • DO SAY...

- I wanted to check in with you, you haven't seemed yourself lately.
- Is something bothering you?
- I'm listening.
- I am concerned about your safety. Have you thought about suicide or harming yourself?
- You are not alone in this. I am here for you. We will get through this together.
- How long have you been feeling like this?
- Have you thought about getting help?
- Thanks for opening up to me.
- How can I support you?
- I'm sorry that you're in so much pain.
- You are important to me.
- Do you want a hug?
- You are not going crazy.
- I may not be able to understand exactly how you feel, but I care about you and I can listen
- It's not your fault.
- It's the illness that causes these thoughts and feelings.
- This must be really difficult for you.

### ACTIVE LISTENING PHRASES

Try these when engaging in conversation so other person feels heard.

- ENCOURAGING  
Can you tell me more?
- CLARIFYING  
When did this happen?
- SUMMARIZING  
Let me see if I understand what you said...
- ACKNOWLEDGING  
I can see you are feeling very angry right now.
- OPEN QUESTIONS  
Why\_\_?" What would you like to see happen?
- RESPONDING  
I see it this way\_\_\_. How do you see it?
- SOLICITING  
I'd like your advice on how we can resolve this.
- ENCOURAGING  
How would you feel if it were you?
- NORMALIZING  
Many people feel the way you do.
- EMPATHIZING  
I can appreciate why you feel that way.
- REFRAMING  
I understand that you feel\_\_ when I/she/he\_\_
- VALIDATING  
I appreciate your willingness to\_\_\_\_\_

### YOUR WORDS MATTER • DO NOT SAY...

- It's all in your head.
- What's wrong with you?
- Shouldn't you be better by now?
- Just snap out of it!
- You'll get over it, you just have to ignore it and get on with your life.
- We all have bad days. You will feel differently tomorrow.

## PRACTICE ACTIVE LISTENING

### Tip 1. BE RECEPTIVE

- Take the lead, show initiative and ask: **"Are you OK?"**.
- Put the invitation out there: **"I've got time to talk"**. (put away your cell phone)
- Maintain eye contact and sit in a relaxed position (positive body language helps you both feel more comfortable)

### Tip 2. USE ICE BREAKERS TO INITIATE A CONVERSATION

- Use open-ended questions such as **"So tell me about...?"**, which require more than a "yes" or "no" answer.
- Ask how they are feeling and share with them what you are noticing. Listen to what they are saying and notice their body language and the emotion behind their words. Possible questions to start a conversation:  
*"I've noticed you've seemed really stressed for a while. Is there anyone you've been able to talk to about it?"*  
*"Lots of people go through this sort of thing. Getting help might make it easier. Has anything helped in the past?"*  
*"I hate to see you struggling on your own. There are people that can help. Have you thought of visiting your doctor? Are you able to talk to your parents?"*

### Tip 3. PRACTICE YOUR LISTENING SKILLS

- Be patient. Let them take their time. Be open-minded & non-judgemental. Try not to form opinions or plan responses. Sometimes, they need someone to listen and they're not always seeking advice. Remember that their experiences are not the same as yours. Avoid telling someone what to do.
- After they share, consider saying **"How can I support you?"**
- Active listening allows the speaker to feel heard and allows listener to listen without having to have a solution.

### Tip 4. BE ENCOURAGING

- Ask questions. Reach out. Listen. Check-in. Be kind. Show compassion. Don't minimize feelings.
- Encourage self-care. Maintaining regular exercise, a nutritious diet, balance around their digital devices and social media, and getting regular sleep helps to cope in tough times.
- Encourage the person to talk to a trusted adult (parent, teacher, counselor, coach), and to seek professional help from their family doctor, a support service or counselor, or a mental health worker.
- People can feel vulnerable after opening up and they need to know they can trust you with their story so (unless the person intends to hurt themselves) it's important to keep their confidence and not share with other friends.
- Don't give up if your friend pulls away. People with mental health disorders sometimes withdraw from family and friends. It is important to keep trying to spend time with them. Doing this may help them realize that you are available and that you care. Ask them, "Can I check back in with you tomorrow?" to keep communication open.

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## MENTAL HEALTH VS MENTAL ILLNESS

**MENTAL HEALTH** is part of our overall health, everyone has it and it changes throughout our lives. Mental health is about how you feel, think, and act (our emotions, thoughts & feelings, our ability to solve problems and overcome difficulties, our social connections, our understanding of the world around us). We can all work at improving our mental health the same way that we can change and improve our physical health. **MENTAL ILLNESS** is a disorder that disrupts a person's thinking, feelings, mood, ability to relate to others, and daily functioning.



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## HELP RESOURCES FOR YOUTH

If someone tells you they are thinking about suicide, you will want to **tell a trusted adult**. If you are worried that the person will think you "ratted them out", tell them that you need to be sure they are going to be safe. It is a good idea to offer to include the person when you talk to someone else. **ASK:** **"I really care about you and I am worried."** **"Are you thinking of ending your life?"** **"I think we need to ask for help."** **"What adult do you trust that you could talk to, to get help?"**

You can help them make the call or text...

- Call **SAFTY, 888.334.2777**, mobile crisis response service available to all SB County youth 8am-8pm
- **TEXT 741741** to communication with a trained counselor.
- Talk to your School Dean, a Counselor, a Teacher, use the STOPiT app for your school.
- If someone hurts themselves after talking to you, it's not your fault. Being supportive and doing what you can to help gives people some relief when they are thinking of suicide, even if relief doesn't last long enough to prevent it.