

How to Start a Conversation with Your Friend About Their Wellness

It can be tricky to bring it up, but if you're worried about saying the wrong thing, don't be. The best way to start is to just ask them if they're okay.

If you think someone might be dealing with depression or anxiety, you might avoid them because you don't know what to do or say, or maybe you don't really understand what it's all about. This can make it harder for them to get through it. To make it go better, for both of you.

Here are a few tips:

- pick a place that's quiet and private
- give yourself plenty of time
- listen, more than talk. Really listen closely to understand how they're feeling
- save your advice for later
- show you're really listening
- listening isn't the same thing as agreeing. You can understand another person's point of view without agreeing with it.
- try to ask open-ended questions like; "How are you feeling?" or "Why do you think that?"
- offer reassurance and hope. Say things like "Thank you for telling me this", "There is a way through this", "I am here for you".

Things NOT to do

It's really important to be kind and accepting. The person has opened up to you, which is probably a big thing for them, so it's important not to:

- tell them to 'snap out of it' or 'harden up' – People cannot 'make' themselves better
- encourage excess alcohol and drug use as a way of coping - it can make things worse
- avoid them – they already feel alone and this can make their depression worse
- assume the problem will just go away
- judge or criticise them for what they're going through
- suggest or imply they're weak or a burden on others.

Please take any thoughts (whakaaro) around suicide or self-harm seriously – and it's okay to talk (kōrero) about it. Don't leave someone alone if they say they feel unsafe.

If you think someone is having thoughts about hurting or killing themselves, urgent help is needed. Emergency teams (called CRS or PES) provide 24 hours a day, 7 days a week assessment and short-term treatment services for people experiencing a serious mental health crisis. This could include safety issues. Contact your local Mental Health Services immediately.

Keeping secrets when it comes to suicide and self-harm can be unhelpful for both you and the person. Talk with someone else or call a helpline to discuss your concerns.

Always ask permission to contact services on a person's behalf however if you feel they are in immediate danger and they won't give permission you may need to go against their wishes.

Looking after yourself

If you are the main support person for someone going through depression or anxiety it can be rewarding, but it is challenging too. It could take a while for them to get through it, which is why it's really important to look after yourself.

It's really important to make sure you have support (tautoko) for yourself when you are supporting someone else, as it can take a lot out of you. Talking to others who are in a similar situation may be helpful. You need to care for your own wellbeing as well as the person you are caring for, and feel OK about this. Make time and space to look after yourself. Make sure you find opportunities to relax, have fun and take a break when you need it. Talking to others who are in a similar situation may be helpful. Think about contacting a support network. Exercise and sleep are also critical.

Ask yourself:

- Do I have someone I trust to talk to?
- Do I get enough breaks?
- Have I got regular times for relaxation?
- Am I getting regular exercise?
- Am I eating nutritious meals (kai)?
- Do I get enough sleep?

Source: <https://depression.org.nz/help-someone/>