

How to have a conversation about your own mental health

Our newsletter last week, covered how to look after your family's wellbeing. As parents, partners, teachers and even as colleagues, we often spend a lot of time worrying about how everyone else is coping and not enough time considering our own needs; we can't help everyone else if we aren't okay ourselves. It is easy to find ourselves in a situation where we feel overwhelmed and wonder: how did I get here? This week, we are going to be thinking about how to talk about our own mental health and suggesting some ways in which we can ask for support if we need it.

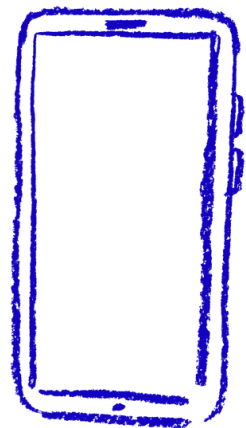
It is normal to worry about telling others about how you are feeling, but trying to deal with mental health issues on our own is very difficult and can often make you feel worse. Although it can be daunting to admit that we are struggling for fear of what others will think of us, most people tell us that they feel like a weight is lifted just by voicing their issues.



Last week, we looked briefly at how to start a conversation with someone else about their mental health and you can apply most of those ideas to discussing your own mental health. Sometimes, by initiating a conversation with others about how they are coping with a certain situation, we can then talk about how we are feeling and let people know if we are finding things difficult.

Things to consider before starting a conversation

It is okay to ask for help and it's okay to be worried about how people will react to what you have to say; the most important thing to remember is that things could get a lot worse if you don't talk to someone. Have a think about who you feel confident talking to. You probably want to talk to someone who you know will listen and who is likely to be understanding; perhaps someone who has been kind to you in the past or is particularly supportive in difficult situations. You also need to decide how you want to talk; face to face conversations may feel a bit daunting. You might want to write a letter or send an email. Sometimes it is easier to talk over the phone.



You might want to plan what you are going to say. There may be things that you feel are important that you don't want to miss out; perhaps you could write a list of the things you need to talk about. It is also important to choose your time wisely. Talking about mental health is not easy and it is important that we have the attention of the person we are talking to when we are discussing something this important. Sometimes it can be easier to have a conversation with someone when we are engaged in an activity together; perhaps out for a walk together or maybe in the car. Sometimes it is easier to start talking when we are not face to face and don't have direct eye contact.

Think about how to start the conversation



"Can I talk to you about..?"

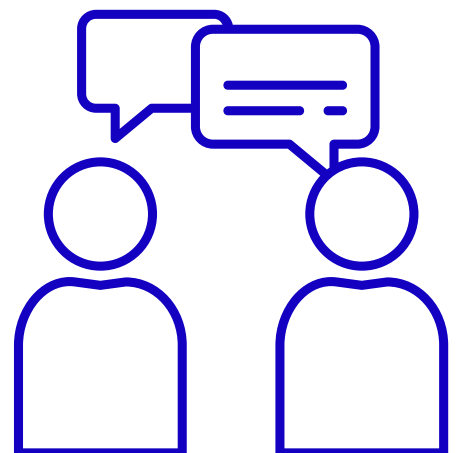


"I'm finding it hard to cope at the moment."

Explain how you are feeling and how it is impacting on your life. If you aren't eating or sleeping well you could share that information; if you have seen something that accurately describes how you are feeling you could share this with them; it may help them to understand how you are feeling. If you know what you need them to do in order to help you, let them know. If you need help finding information, or help in seeking support from your GP or another trusted adult then let them know that is what you need. Perhaps you just need someone to listen and you could let them know that you aren't expecting them to do anything, that you just need someone to talk to.

What to say...

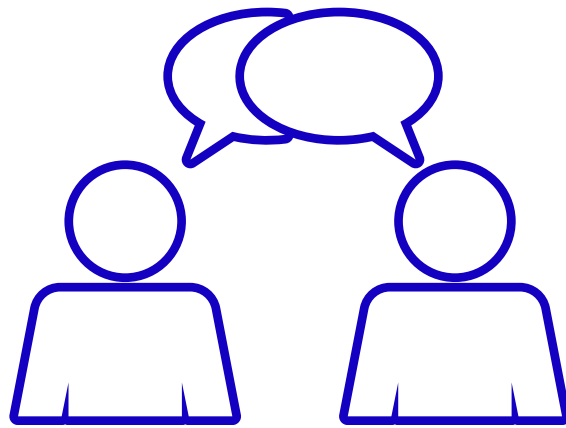
You might not feel that you want to share everything about how you are feeling at once. You may need to share a little bit of information and see how that feels before you talk about other aspects of the issues you are facing. Try not to overwhelm yourself by saying too much too soon. Some people find they just want someone to know that they are finding things hard; for some, once they start talking it can be hard to stop. See how you feel at the time, either is ok, as long as you feel comfortable.



What might happen next

Hopefully, you will feel relieved when you have spoken to someone and they will be able to offer you some comfort and guidance about what to do next. You may feel an enormous sense of relief and like a weight has been lifted, people often say that talking about how they are feeling is the hardest part and once they have started to talk they find it easier to process how they are feeling and easier to see a way forward.

You should consider how you may feel if the person you are talking to doesn't react how you expect them to. Be aware that if someone is worried about your safety, they may feel that they need to talk to someone else to ask advice about what they should do. If the person you choose to talk to doesn't take you seriously and you feel that they don't understand: that isn't your fault. They may be shocked by what you have told them and they might need some time to process what you have said. Some people might feel that they can't help and ask you to speak to someone else. Try not to feel hurt, just understand that not everyone finds it easy to discuss mental health. If this does happen then try talking to someone else, you are not alone and you deserve support.



Places that you can find support

- Contact your own GP
- Coventry and Warwickshire Mind – cwmind.org.uk
- Mind – mind.org.uk
- Improving Access to Psychological Therapies – healthymindservice.com
- The Mix (for U25) – themix.org.uk

You can also call the Coventry and Warwickshire Mental Health Helpline, 24/7, 365 days a year on 0800 616171.

This document was written by Laura Maher on behalf of Coventry and Warwickshire Mind.