

Wellbeing for the Bush

LISTENING & COMMUNICATING

This resource is a first step or a reminder of effective ways of listening and communicating with someone who may need support. We can all be affected by personal distress at some point in our lives. *This is not a clinical intervention. These are the conversations you have with your neighbour, work colleague, or friend.*



1. Prepare



2. Ask



3. Listen



4. Support

1. Prepare

There are a couple of ways to prepare for a conversation. It is important to feel as though you have some basic knowledge about mental health and the resources and supports that are available.

When you plan to have a conversation with someone you are concerned about, before having the conversation, ask yourself a couple of questions:

- Are you prepared?
- Do you feel ready?
- How do you feel today?
- Are you the right person to have the conversation?

It is okay to feel anxious – conversations can be difficult.

2. Ask

It is understandable to feel nervous before asking someone about their wellbeing. Not wanting to say the wrong thing or make things worse is a common worry.

It can be challenging to know how to start a conversation with someone you are concerned about.

The following are some examples of conversation starters.

- “I have noticed (name what you have noticed that is different). Is everything okay?”
- “You haven’t seemed yourself lately. Is everything okay?”
- “It’s been a really tough time lately. How are you coping with everything?”

Below are some simple tips for talking with someone.

- Use open-ended questions that don’t require yes or no answers
- Keep it simple – “How can I help?”
- Help them see they are not alone
- Try not to use jargon or platitudes (e.g. look on the bright side!)
- Don’t judge their experiences or reactions but acknowledge that things seem tough for them
- Be aware of non-verbal cues and body language.

What to say next

Below are some suggestions for continuing the conversation once you have asked how they are going.

- “Just take your time, there is no rush. I know talking about this can be difficult.”
- “I can hear that the last few months have been really terrible for you. Please tell me more about it.”
- “Can I just check that I have understood you correctly?”
- “What’s that like for you?”

3. Listen

As health workers we often try to jump in and ‘fix’ things. Sometimes we need to step back and allow the person to talk and for us to just listen.

There are many occasions when being listened to is all that is required to help people through a difficult time.

Silence and pauses are okay.

4. Support

Whether it’s a friend, family, colleague or client/patient that you are supporting, you can play a significant role.

During the listening step, you will get an understanding of the issues they are experiencing, what support they have, and things that might help. Below are some key tips for supporting someone:

- It’s important that you reassure them they are not alone and there is hope that things can get better.
- Check your understanding of the situation and what you can do to help. Ask, “What do you think I can do to support you?”

Planning your own self-care:

- Remember to look after yourself as well
- Don’t forget your own self care.



Early intervention from a colleague, friend, or compassionate health provider could make a real difference to saving lives. Everyone has the capacity to help and to do so safely.

When is extra professional help needed?

- If the person is not feeling better or improving
- The symptoms are interfering with daily life and affecting ability to function
- They are isolating from friends and family
- They have a sense of ongoing hopelessness, lack of pleasure
- There is evidence of risk-taking, thoughts of self-harm or suicide
- Avoidance.

More information

Access CRANApus’ free online course ‘Critical Conversations’: crana.org.au/critical-conversations

Black Dog Institute: www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/How-to-help-when-youre-worried-about-someones-mental-health.pdf

RUOK: <https://www.ruok.org.au/how-to-ask>