

WHAT IF SOMEONE TALKS TO YOU ABOUT THEIR MENTAL HEALTH?



LISTEN.

Let them finish their sentences and complete thoughts without interrupting. After they have finished you can respond.



LET THEM KNOW IF YOU UNDERSTAND.

If someone has just spilled their guts and you've gone through something similar—tell them. It helps a lot for someone to know they aren't alone. Make sure you don't switch the topic of conversation to your struggles though; focus on their needs.

AVOID BEING JUDGMENTAL.

Don't tell them they are being weird or crazy; it's not helpful at all.

TAKE THEM SERIOUSLY.

Try not to respond with statements that minimize how they are feeling or what they are going through, such as, "You're just having a bad week," or "I'm sure it's nothing."

MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE TO TALK TO AGAIN IF NEEDED.

While it can be a big relief for someone to share something they have been keeping secret, mental health struggles usually aren't solved with one conversation. Let the person who has spoken with you know that they can reach out to you again if they are having a tough time.

It's ok to let them know if there is a time of day or certain days of the week that you aren't available. For instance, "I'm here for you if you need to talk, but my parents don't let me use the phone after 9 on school nights, so call before then."

DON'T TURN WHAT YOU'VE BEEN TOLD INTO GOSSIP.

If someone is talking to you about their mental health, it was probably tough for them to work up the nerve to say something in the first place and you shouldn't share what they tell you with other students at school. Let them share on their own terms.



IF YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, DO SOME RESEARCH AND LEARN ABOUT WHAT YOU'VE BEEN TOLD.

Make sure that your information is coming from reliable sources like government agencies and health organizations.



TELL AN ADULT IF YOU HAVE TO.

It's important to have friends that trust you, but if a friend indicates they have thoughts or plans of hurting themselves or another person, have been hearing voices or seeing things that no one else can hear or see, or have any other signs and symptoms that shouldn't be ignored (see page 1) then you need to tell an adult what is going on. That doesn't make you a bad friend; it just means that the problem requires more help than you can give.

If someone you know is in crisis and needs help urgently, call 1-800-273-TALK (8255), text 741741, go to your local Emergency Room or call 911.

NOW WHAT?

If you've made the decision to talk to someone about your mental health, you may be nervous about how things will go and what could happen. Check out the list below to find out more about what you can expect.

Things might be a little awkward at first for both people in the conversation.

For a lot of people, talking about anything related to their health or body can be kind of tough at first.

You'll probably feel relieved.

Being able to open up and share something you've been keeping to yourself for a long time can feel like a weight has been lifted. You might learn that the person you're talking to has had some personal experience or knows someone in their family who has gone through something similar, which will help you to feel less alone.

You may encounter someone who doesn't understand.

While it's likely that a person will know someone who has struggled with their mental health, they may not understand what it's like—especially if they haven't struggled themselves.

Expect to be asked questions.

Some questions might include: How long has this been going on? Did something difficult happen before you started feeling this way? Can you describe what it's like? You don't have to answer every question that you're asked if you don't want. Remember that the person you're talking to is probably asking questions to help them better understand what you're going through.

It's possible that you might not get the reaction you were hoping for.

It can be discouraging if you work up the nerve to speak up and are then told, "you've just got the blues" "get over it" "stop being silly" or "you worry too much." Sometimes this kind of reaction has to do with culture or expectations. Try to explain how it is really having an effect on your ability to live a healthy and happy life and you aren't sure how to make things better. If for some reason the person you chose to talk to still isn't "getting it" someone else will. Think about someone else you could talk to that would give you the help you need. Don't stop or go back to ignoring your situation or struggling alone.

The conversation is the first step in a process.

Congratulations for getting the ball rolling.

If your first conversation isn't with your parents, you'll probably need to talk to them at some point.

See the following page for tips and common concerns about talking to parents.

Your next step might be going to an appointment of some sort.

It may start with someone at school like the guidance counselor or school psychologist, a visit to your regular family doctor or psychiatrist, or with another kind of treatment provider like a therapist or social worker. These professionals can help figure out what exactly is going on and how to start getting you the help you need. You might need to talk to more than one person to find someone who can be the most helpful.

It takes time to get better.

You could be going through something situational, which can improve with time to process feelings (for example, grief after the death of a loved one or a tough break-up) or adjustments to your environment (like switching lockers to get away from someone who is a bully), or you could have a more long term mental health issue. Mental health issues are common and treatable; however, you may have to try a few different things to find right type of treatment or combination of strategies that works best for you.