

Supportive Conversation Guide: How to Talk With Empathy & Compassion

Having a supportive, nonjudgmental conversation when someone you love is struggling with mental health can feel overwhelming. This guide will help you choose the right words and actions that can make a big impact and bring comfort to those in need.

1. Preparing for the Conversation

- Ensure you are in a calm state of mind
 - Set aside distractions and make time for the conversation
 - Approach the conversation with an open heart and mind, free from judgement
 - Choose a quiet, private space where the person feels comfortable
 - Make sure the setting is peaceful and free from interruptions
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2. What to Say

- OPENING THE CONVERSATION:

“I’ve noticed you’ve been having a tough time lately, and I’m here if you want to talk.”

“I care about you, and I’m here to listen whenever you feel ready.”

“You don’t have to go through this alone; I’m here for you.”

- EMPATHIZING & VALIDATING FEELINGS:

“I can’t imagine how tough this must be for you, but I’m here to support you.”

“It sounds like you’re feeling really overwhelmed right now. That must be hard.”

“I understand that it’s difficult to talk about, but I’m really glad you’re sharing this with me.”

- ASKING SUPPORTIVE QUESTIONS:

“What can I do to help right now?”

“Would you like to talk more about what’s been going on?”

“How are you feeling about everything? Is there anything you want to share?”

- OFFERING ENCOURAGEMENT:

“It’s ok to not have all the answers right now. We’ll figure this out together.”

“You’re not alone in this. Many people care about you and want to help.”

“Taking small steps toward feeling better is ok, and I’m here for you every step of the way.”

3. What to Avoid

	DON'T Say	DO Say
AVOID DISMISSING or MINIMIZING FEELINGS	<i>"It's not that big of a deal."</i>	<i>"I understand that what you're going through is really tough."</i>
AVOID GIVING UNSOLICITED ADVICE:	<i>"Just think positive!"</i>	<i>"It's ok if you want to vent; I'm not here to judge"</i>
AVOID OVER-HELPING or FIXING THE PROBLEM:	<i>"Why don't you just [do this] to make it better?"</i>	<i>"I'm here to help, but I understand if you're not ready yet."</i>
AVOID MAKING IT ABOUT YOU	<i>"I know exactly how you feel because I've been through something similar."</i>	<i>"I can't fully understand what you're going through, but I'll listen if you want to talk."</i>

4. Tips for Active Listening

- BE PRESENT:

Focus on the speaker, and show you're actively engaged through body language (nodding, eye contact, etc.)

- AVOID INTERRUPTING:

Let the person speak without jumping in with solutions or thoughts right away. Just listen and give them space.

- ASK CLARIFYING QUESTIONS:

"What do you mean when you say you're feeling overwhelmed?"

or

"Can you tell me more about what that's like for you?"

5. Next Steps After the Conversation

- OFFER ONGOING SUPPORT:

“I’m always here to listen. You can reach out to me anytime you need to talk or just need someone to be there.”

- ENCOURAGE PROFESSIONAL HELP WHEN NEEDED:

“It might be helpful to talk to a therapist or counselor, and I’d be happy to help you find someone or make the first call if you want.”

or

“Would you like me to help you find a support group or other resource?”

- FOLLOW UP:

Make sure to check in with them after the conversation: “I just wanted to see how you’re doing today. I’m thinking of you.”

5. A Few Final Tips

- Practice these supportive conversation techniques before having the actual conversation
- Simply listening and showing empathy can make a huge difference in someone’s mental health journey
- Congratulating them on every “little” improvement they make, and telling them how proud you are of their growth goes a long way as well.

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