

Toolbox Talk

Talking about mental health

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We know talking about mental health is not always easy. Starting a conversation doesn't have to be awkward and being there for someone can make a huge difference. There is no right way to talk about mental health. There is no right place either. You can talk about mental health anywhere! The main thing to consider is that the conversation is safe and discreet.



However, if you're not sure how to get a conversation started, there are plenty of different ideas you could try. Whether you would like to open up to others about your own mental illness or support someone you know here are just a few tips.

- **Start small** - Many people find talking in person intimidating, and that's understandable. But it doesn't need to stop you from starting a conversation altogether. You could make a quick phone call, send your best mate a text, or leave a note.



"It is not the massive gestures or the giant paragraphs that have made the biggest difference, but the little things. It doesn't take long to send a quick text, but the impact it has is huge. A text from a friend reinforced how I wasn't alone."

- **Find a good time & place** - Sometimes it's easier to talk side by side rather than face to face. So, if you do talk in person, you might want to chat while you are doing something else. You could start a conversation when you're walking, cooking or stuck in traffic.

"Walking together or sitting driving are both amazing, because the experience of talking to someone whilst you're side by side can be so much more freeing and less daunting than face to face. The changing scenery helps too."



- **Ask questions (gently!)** - There are lots of misconceptions around mental illness. That means asking questions can be an important way of learning. Just remember not to get too personal and be aware if the discussion is making someone feel uncomfortable.

"It is far better to ask people the questions you have outright rather than assuming things. People with a mental health condition can always tell you politely if you're wrong. If you ask a stupid question, then you can both laugh later together."



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- **Be open** - Being open and honest with others can help to build trust. For example, you might choose to tell your friend something about you that they may not know. Don't feel pressure to share anything that you are not comfortable with.

"It doesn't have to be anything major – but being a bit more open about things, especially as a man, can often encourage a good friend to do the same."



- **Treat them the same** - When someone is diagnosed with a mental illness, they're still the same person as they were before. That means when a friend or loved one opens up about mental health, they don't want to be treated any differently. If you want to support them, keep it simple. Do the things you'd normally do.

"If you'd usually meet for a meal, don't say let's go to the zoo. Keep things the way they were 'before'."



For more information on Mental Health please visit the Atlas [Health and Wellbeing](#) page.