

Helping a Friend Who is Struggling

Most young adults turn to their friends for help if they are experiencing emotional distress or having a problem. Friends are often the first line of support for young adults living with a mental health condition.

However, it can be difficult to know how to respond appropriately when a friend shares with you that he or she has been diagnosed with a mental health condition or is worried about his or her mental health. How you respond may depend on how close you are as a friend. If you have a long history with your friend, you may feel more comfortable talking about the issue and serving as a key source of support. If you are an acquaintance, your role may be telling someone else who can better help your friend. In any situation, the best way to help a friend is to remain in contact and to be supportive and encouraging in getting them to seek help.

Here are some tips on what else you can say and do:

- Express your concern and sympathy.
- Ask for more details about your friend's diagnosis or concerns and how he or she is doing.
- Make sure your friend knows you honestly care.
- Ask what you can do to help. You can leave this question open-ended or you can suggest specific things that might help your friend. For example, you can ask if your friend needs a ride to an appointment or would like your company during an appointment. This kind of help can help relieve anxiety and reluctance that your friend may feel when faced with a life-changing diagnosis.
- Offer to help your friend with errands, but be careful not to make your friend feel disempowered.
- Include your friend in your everyday plans—going to the movies, going out to lunch and exercising. If your friend resists going out, reassure and re-invite without being overbearing. Being with friends can help young adults feel better and recover from a mental health condition—you can play a critical role in ensuring that your friend does not become socially isolated.
- Provide hope and encouragement.
- Remind your friend that mental health conditions are treatable. If your friend is not receiving treatment, offer your help in identifying and getting the right kind of care.
- If your friend experiences a psychiatric crisis, ask them what kind of help he or she needs and respond immediately. It is important to encourage your friend to seek support, and if a psychiatric crisis develops to share the local crisis line or the National Suicide Prevention LifeLine at 1 (800) 271-TALK (8255).
- Educate yourself about mental health conditions and treatment options to become aware of the myths and facts of mental health conditions and to show your friend you care and want to help him or her.
- You may want to consider becoming involved in your local mental health advocacy organization so you are doing something positive as a result of your friend's personal experience.
- If you are worried about a friend's mental health, talk to them about your concerns and encourage them to seek help, if needed. For information on the early warning signs of a mental health condition, take a look at [NAMI's Mental Health Conditions in College Students](#) fact sheets.

If you think your friend may be considering suicide, it is always good to start a conversation with him or her. Sometimes just talking about it may help your friend feel less alone and more cared about and understood. It also allows you to get help for your friend. Most of the time, young adults considering suicide are willing to talk if someone asks them out of concern or care. If your friend does reveal to you that he or she is considering suicide, you must get help as soon as possible—even if your friend swears you to secrecy. Your friend's life may depend on it so it is critical to tell someone you trust as soon as you can or have your friend call the National Suicide Prevention LifeLine at 1 (800) 271-TALK (8255).

For more information on helping a friend living with a mental health condition, visit [What A Difference A Friend Makes](#). Also check out the [Friends and Family](#) section on [StrengthofUs.org](#), NAMI's social networking and online resource center for young adults. *For more information and to access the links in this document, go to www.nami.org/campus*