

Having the conversation

In a 2022 poll conducted by the National Alliance on Mental Illness, findings showed that teens are comfortable talking about mental health, but often will not start the conversation themselves. Having a mental health discussion with a friend can seem intimidating, so use this resource as a guide to start and continue the conversation.

If your friend is having suicidal thoughts, tell a trusted adult—even if they told you not to.

Start by letting people know you are willing to talk about mental health.

You can do this by being open about your own mental health. It can have a powerful effect to let someone know you have gone through something similar, or that you are a safe person to talk to if they need someone.

"When I was struggling at a time, I found it helpful to talk to someone I trusted. I can be a listening ear if you want to talk."

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, 2024
National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2022

988

SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE

**For additional
information, contact
Olivia Hesler at
ohesler@health.in.gov**

**Scan the QR code to get
additional support on
helping your friend:**



**Indiana
Department
of
Health**

Division of
**Family Health
Data and Fatality
Prevention**

**Starting the
Conversation:
A guide to having a
mental health discussion**



**Indiana
Department
of
Health**



If you think your friend is struggling

Start by speaking to them privately and with empathy. Let them know that you understand, and it's okay and normal to struggle from life's challenges. Normalize mental health by talking about it directly. For example, you can say:

"I noticed you haven't been yourself lately. I care about you, and I am wondering how you are doing."

"With everything that is happening at school, are you feeling stressed or overwhelmed?"

"I found it helpful to talk to someone when my family was struggling last year. I'm here to listen and support you."

The timing might not always be right.

In the moment you notice someone struggling, it might not be the perfect timing to talk to someone, so it is okay to circle back. Let them know that you will be there to have a conversation at a time that's right for them. For example, you can say:

"The other day you seemed upset, I was concerned and wanted to see how you are doing. Do you want to talk?"

"Can we get coffee soon and talk about it?"

What if they hesitate to talk?

Some people might feel like a burden to others, often saying something like, "You must be tired of hearing about all this." You can reassure them that you want to be there to support them, but you can also offer to help them find someone else to talk to if they prefer. For example, you can say:

"I want to be there for you. I get that life is difficult, so I am here to listen and support you."

"Is there someone else that would make you feel more comfortable to talk to? I can help you find someone if you would like."

Ending the conversation

End the conversation by reassuring them that you are glad they were able to talk to you about this. Remind them that life can have different challenges at times, but you will continue to be there for them. For example, you can say:

"Everyone goes through periods of time where they are struggling, but just because you are struggling now, does not mean you will always feel this way."

What if someone tells you they are thinking about suicide?

If your friend expresses to you that they are thinking about suicide, you might feel a lot of pressure. It is important to stay calm and do what you can to help them.

Let them know you're listening and you support them.

"Nothing you're going through changes how I think about you. I am here to support you."

"Your situation sounds really difficult. How long has this been going on?"

"When did these feelings start?"

"Have these thoughts led to specific changes in your life? Are you having trouble sleeping or eating?"

Be direct and ask questions:

"Are you thinking about suicide?"

"How often are you having these thoughts?"

"When it gets really bad, what do you do?"

"These feelings might be a signal that it's time to talk to a mental health professional."

Suggest professional help:

"I hear that you're struggling, I think talking to a professional could be helpful."

"If you're not ready to go in person, you can talk to someone through the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline."

"I can help you find a health care provider. We can figure it out together."