

Conversation Starters for Students

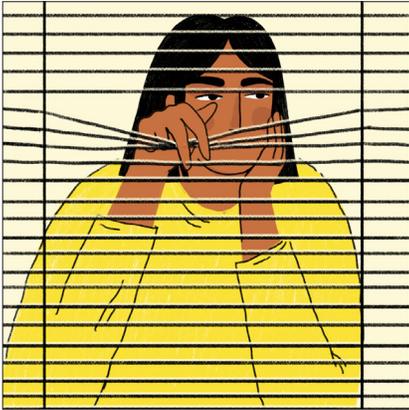
from seizetheawkward.org

No need to be an expert. Just be a friend.

It's hard to know what to say to someone who is struggling with depression, anxiety, or other mental health issues. These tips should make it easier to talk about mental health.

KNOW THE SIGNS

IS YOUR FRIEND GOING THROUGH A TOUGH TIME? There's a number of signs to watch out for. But you know your friends best, so trust your gut. And if something seems wrong, ask.



They don't feel like hanging out as much



Their mind seems to be somewhere else



They're so anxious, they can't relax



They've gotten negative about life



They're not acting like themselves and are more irritable than usual



They're taking more risks than usual



They talk about feeling hopeless



They're taking more drugs or drinking more



They're harming themselves

STARTING A CONVERSATION

NO NEED TO BE AN EXPERT. JUST BE A FRIEND. These tips should make starting a conversation about mental health a lot less awkward.

- Keep it casual. Relax: think of it as a chill chat, not a therapy session.
- Listen up. Let them take the lead.
- Avoid offering advice or trying to fix their problems.
- Let them know it's OK to feel the way they do.
- Make yourself available. Be the friend they can rely on.
- Ask open-ended questions. Help them to talk, not just say “yes” or “no”.
- Let them open up at their own speed.
- Don't demand answers or force them to say anything they're not ready to.
- Encourage them to talk to an expert.
- Tell them you won't ever judge them.
- Let them know that this won't change how you feel about them.
- Ask them if they have seen a doctor.

AFTER THE CONVERSATION

YOU SEIZED THE AWKWARD. WHAT NOW? Keep checking in, and if you want to do more, there's a bunch of other ways to help your friend:



Don't Give Up

Maybe the first attempt didn't go so well or maybe they just weren't ready to talk. Show your friend that you're there for them. Stay available and keep checking in.



Keep Invitations Coming

Even if they don't accept, it's important to keep offering because it still helps. Rejection probably isn't personal. Let your friend know you're there for them.



Handle Their Trust With Care

You may be the only person they talk to about this. Show you care and avoid gossiping about them or turning people against them.



Get Some Outside Help

You don't have to do this on your own. If you need to talk to someone, that's fine. Don't be afraid to reach out for help from a parent, teacher, counselor or someone you trust.

If you're worried or not sleeping out of concern for a friend, it may also be a good idea to get some outside support. Even if you aren't sure that problem is serious, you should still ask for help.

USC Student Health

Keck Medicine of USC

213-740-9355 (WELL)

One number. 24/7. Serving students on two campuses.

USC Student Health services are available through the single phone number **213-740-9355 (WELL)**—including all services:

Counseling and Mental Health Services, a division of the *Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Keck School of Medicine of USC*

Medical Services, with providers on clinical faculty of the *Departments of Family Medicine, Obstetrics and Gynecology, Dermatology, Orthopaedic Surgery, Keck School of Medicine of USC; and professional affiliations with the USC Chan Division of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, the USC School of Pharmacy, and the Division of Physical Therapy and Biokinesiology.*

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services, with counselors who are clinical faculty of the *Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Keck School of Medicine of USC*

A nurse (for medical concerns) or licensed counselor (for mental health concerns) is available 24 hours a day, even when the student health centers are closed and during university closures.

Did You Know? *About accessing care:*

Students in crisis may walk-in for urgent mental health services at the health centers (Engemann Student Health Center on UPC or Eric Cohen Student Health Center at HSC) during operational hours without an appointment; this may include urgent matters involving a death in the family, suicide concern, crime/sexual assault survivor counseling, or other high-risk matters.

Urgent “sick” appointments for medical care are available “same-day” for students needing care during operational hours.

The evening operators of the 24/7 phone service line can connect to USC Student Health services when an urgent matter presents itself.

Sexual assault survivors requiring transportation to a SART center can ask RSVP to call a Lyft ride (an “on-call” staff advocates program to accompany survivors is in development for operation this semester).

MySHR (the student health record portal) shows all available regular appointment times; many appointments can be made within 24-48 hours.

Campus incident post-ventions are regularly provided by Counseling and Mental Health Services on campus for students; departments are encouraged to contact us to learn more or to make arrangements.