

Guide to asking twice

Don't worry – you don't have to be an expert to open up about mental health. You can follow these 5 simple steps:

1. Take it seriously

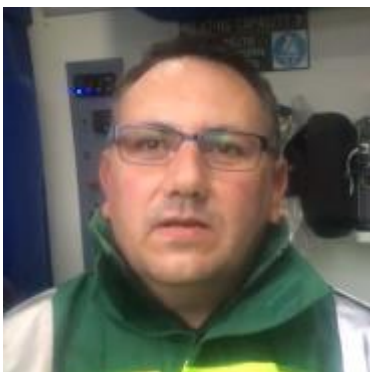
It can feel embarrassing and exposing to talk about your thoughts and feelings, especially if they're disturbing. Don't laugh or treat it like a joke. However strange it might seem to you, remember it's real to them.



"I don't expect my mates to fully understand my mental health problem, but when they acknowledge it must be difficult and don't dismiss my feelings, it helps a lot." Carl

2. Listen and reflect

You don't have to have all the answers – just listening can make a big difference. Try and show that you're taking on board what they're saying. You can do this by reflecting – that is, saying something simple like “that sounds really difficult”. You could also say something like “thanks for telling me”, to show that you appreciate having the conversation.



When I talked to Nathan for the first time, I don't think he was prepared for everything I was saying. But that didn't matter, because once I started speaking, I felt this sense of relief that someone was there, in my corner, to listen to me. Andrew

3. Ask questions

We worry about prying when it comes to others' mental health, but it's better to ask questions. It can help them to get things off their chest, and by keeping the conversation going it shows that you care.

Some of the questions you might ask:

- "What does it feel like?"
- "What kind of thoughts are you having?"
- "How can I help?"

4. Don't try and fix it

It's human nature to want to fix things, but expecting things to change right away isn't helpful. It's not your job to make their mental health problem go away – it's often more helpful just to listen, ask open questions and do things you'd normally do together.

"All I want is for someone to notice. For a friend to say, 'I don't know how it feels, or what you're going through, but if it helps to go out for a drink, or even to sit in silence, I'm here.'" *Matthew*

5. Build your knowledge

You might find it helpful to learn a bit more about what they're going through. If they mention a specific diagnosis, you could learn more about it and read personal stories by people who have experienced similar things.

You might want to learn about the professional help that's available to them and suggest that they explore those options. 'Mind' have a handy guide on seeking help for a mental health problem, 'Rethink Mental Illness' have advice on what to do in a crisis.

More about asking twice

