



Almost half of all Australians will experience a mental health concern in their life. Therefore, it's likely that someone in your life will need you at some point. Support can make a big difference, and there's a lot we can do to assist someone experiencing poor mental health. But it's common to avoid offering support because of concerns about saying or doing the wrong thing.

Be Informed

Knowing about mental health conditions can help to understand what it's like and what will be helpful. Use quality, evidence-based resources to learn about symptoms, services and treatment options available.

Connect

Let the person know you're there by bringing it up at a good time and place (somewhere private, relaxed and uninterrupted). Just listen with respect, compassion, and encouragement – you don't have to have the answers. Non-judgemental responses like; "sounds like you've had a tough time," can help the person feel heard. Avoid comments that are invalidating, like suggesting that they should "just cheer up." Be courageous and kind, and offer the same support that you would want to receive.

No one can be forced to accept support. Even if they're not ready, just knowing you're there is supportive. Reassure them you're available when they're ready. And if you say you'll check in again, make sure you do.

Make sure your body language matches your supportive words. Make eye contact, give reassuring gestures, and if appropriate, offer physical contact like a hug. Small acts of kindness and compassion can make a big difference – make a cup of tea for a co-worker, send a note of encouragement to a friend.

Action Focus

As well as providing a compassionate ear, there may be practical things that can help (cook a meal, offer a lift). Support the person to take action like speaking to a mental health first aider, calling a helpline or contacting EAP. Offer useful information, like pamphlets or website links. Make sure they're still in control and you're not overwhelming them.

If the person is talking about suicide, support them to access help immediately. Don't be sworn to secrecy and don't leave them alone. Work with them to access the best available support such as through their doctor, a crisis helpline, hospital emergency room, or through HR (at work).

Balance

If you have a long-term relationship supporting someone with a mental health condition, then it's also important to look after yourself. You might have a range of feelings like frustration or distress. Find a balance between their needs and yours, and be mindful of what you can reasonably do. Supporting people to connect with other services can help spread support needs between others, debrief with others, speak to a mental health first aider, or seek support through services for carers or EAP.