



Mental Well Being and Tips to ask the Hard Questions....

“My mate just told me he isn’t doing too good”

“I am worried for my friend and their state of mind but I don’t know what to say?”

“He just told me has depression. What can I say to help?”

“My friends marriage broke down and they are not doing so well”

As a front-line therapist, I hear the statement, *‘I didn’t know what to say or how to approach him/her’*, all too often. People phone, make inquiries and ask me all the time, ‘How do I help my friend?’ or ‘How do I get my colleague to access help?’ It seems many people genuinely want to help their mates/colleagues that are struggling, or seem a bit depressed, but they just don’t know how. People are either worried about saying or doing the wrong thing or people just don’t seem to know what to say at all.

So, after 20 years as a therapist and after working with over 30,000 people, I am going to offer some practical tips on ways to ask questions and *really ask* someone if they are okay or support them with mental health and their mental well-being. My hope in sharing this little tip sheet is to assist people to help their mate or friend and be able to *hold someone’s feelings*. The concept of ‘holding someone’s feelings’ means, can you handle what that person has to say when they need help and have something to say?

Research indicates that within Australia one in eight men will have depression and one in five will experience anxiety. Although statistics are slightly higher for women, men seem to be less inclined to talk or seek help. Depression is a high risk-factor for suicide and in Australia suicide is the leading cause of death for men under the age of 54 years (www.beyondblue.com).

RULE NUMBER 1. – Your role in talking to someone about their mental well-being is not to fix anything. Your role is simply to listen, provide a space and time for them to talk and perhaps if there is an opportunity, offer suggestions of where to go for support and help.

Tips:

- *Have awareness of your own vulnerabilities. If holding space and actually talking about people's feelings is tricky for you, you need to either lean into that discomfort or you need to own your story.*

Example: "Thank you for being vulnerable enough to share this information with me. I am going to try my best to help you and support you in any way I can. What is it that you need from me?" Or "Sharing your story is the first step. Thank you for trusting me with this information. In what ways can I help you? Or "I am thankful you told me, and although I am not the best person to help, I am going to find someone to help you because I care and I want to you know you are heard and supported"

- "tell me more about that...."
- "help me to understand...."
- "I am wondering...."
- "Am I hearing you correctly in that you are feeling...."

(allow time for someone to answer. Try to resist the urge to race in and come up with a strategy or plan to support quickly).

- *Holding space for someone's feelings can not hurt you. It may feel unnatural and uncomfortable, but if you can sit with the uncomfortable long enough, you will be able to be there for them in the way they need.*

Example: Remember all your micro interpersonal skills- close the door, allow space for a conversation, turn phone off, postpone meeting, mindful of tone, eye contact, allow person to tell their story, resist the urge to fix straight away.

- *It is okay to be honest and tell the person that you have noticed changes in their behaviour (or mood) that is causing you to be concerned.*

Example. "Hey mate. How are you? I know you have been saying everything is okay, but in the last few weeks you seem a little different or perhaps down. Is everything really okay? I am always here as your friend/leader/colleague...."

- *Try to avoid judgemental or subjective comments about why people may not be coping. Saying things such as, "I don't know what he has to be depressed about. He has a job, a wife, kids" OR "cheer up mate, let's go have a beer it is not that bad".*

(There are many compounding factors and feelings as to why people feel the way they do. Everyone has chapters that they don't like to read out aloud. Please be

mindful that your role in supporting someone is not to try and figure out WHY, it is just to sit with them in their struggle and offer a listening ear – and perhaps suggestions of support)

- *The is a lot of power in just sitting and listening. It is harder than you think to just sit in uncomfortable spaces and just listen.*
- *Please do not underestimate the power of EMPATHY and allowing people to feel while they share their story.*

KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SYMPATHY AN EMPATHY – 4 min clip
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewgu369Jw>

- *If you are going to ask people if they are okay, be prepared to have the time to listen to the answer. Asking someone if you are okay as you are rushing to your car or to a meeting only serves to reinforce to the other person that they are being dismissed.*
- *Be mindful of the way you ask.*

Example: “You are okay aren’t ya mate?” – This comment will elicit a very different response, compared to, “Are you okay? Things just don’t seem ok for you at the moment” (open ended question versus closed ended questions).

- *Never tell someone what to do!!!! Struggling with mental health or any kind of suffering is a very disempowering stressful time. Telling someone what to do only serves to disempower people more.*

Example: Instead of “I think you should go home if you are not coping and take a few days off”. Try, “Would having some time off work help you” or “In what ways can I help and support you?”

Instead of, “You should talk to the counsellor about this”. Try, “Would you like to talk to a professional about this? Talking to a trained professional is about just having a conversation. Talking can really help” OR “Would it be okay that I talk to another colleague about the best way to I can help you. It will be confidential?”

- *Finding someone that people are comfortable talking to is not easy. Finding the right person to hold space, listen and be non-judgemental and just be there is not easy. Please remember that sharing deepest vulnerabilities when people are in our own shame shit storm is one of the hardest things anyone will ever do.*
- *Mental Well-Being and periods of not coping can occur to anyone at any stage of their life chapters. It can include and is not limited to separation, divorce, miscarriage, new baby, behavioural child issues, illness, grieving, financial stress, performance reviews etc.*
- *Encourage them to talk to their GP, a counsellor, their partner, their boss. Please remind them that the one of the biggest antidotes to improvements in*

mental well being is sharing your story with someone who you are comfortable with and who has earned the right to hear it.

Example: “I know talking about this can be hard, but for me talking has really helped... (share your own example)” OR “Finding someone that can give you what you need is very powerful”.

- *Practical support could include, going to see a health professional with them and helping to make an appointment. It is okay to follow up after the appointment and ask how it went.*
- Suggest 24 hours support numbers or community agencies to assist them so they are not alone.
- *Remember support is about listening, suggesting options for support and not pressuring anyone to make decisions.*
- *Stay connected to the person who tells you they aren't okay. Invite them to social activities, call them and check up on them. Staying connected and making your mate feel like someone cares can sometimes make all the difference.*

Support Numbers:

EAP

GP

Lifeline: 13 11 14

Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467

Mensline: 1300 78 9978

www.beyondblue.org.au

Jen @ Relationship Bootcamp

