



When someone says they're not ok

**A guide to talking
about mental health**



Health in Mind

are a charity working to promote positive mental health and wellbeing in Scotland.



Through a wide range of support, including resources like this one, we help people to develop strategies for wellbeing, resilience, hope and positive growth, on their own terms and at their own pace.

To find out more, visit

health.in.mind.org.uk/about-us

In this booklet, you will find tips on how to...

- start a conversation about mental health
- listen well
- look after your own wellbeing
- set clear boundaries
- find the right support

If you'd like more information and guidance, **scan here.**



This booklet is for anyone who'd like to feel more confident in knowing how to respond to someone who's struggling with their mental health.

You don't need to know a lot about mental health.

You don't need to have answers, or to be ready to offer indepth support.

All you need to do is to help start the conversation.

People often find it difficult to speak directly about what they're going through. Being met with kindness and care can make a huge difference.

Because having these conversations can feel so important, it's easy to panic or feel overwhelmed if someone confides in us.

Remember – you don't need to be perfect. You're human too. The tools in this booklet will help you talk about mental health in a caring and supportive way, while making sure you look after yourself as well.

Foundations for a good talk

Every conversation about mental health will go differently – we're all individuals! But here are some principles to keep in mind that will help both you and the person you're talking to feel more safe and secure.

- **Talk honestly and openly**
but be kind!
- **Listen without judgement**
and trust that they're the expert on their own experience.
- **Help them access qualified support** if that's what they want to do.
- **Be honest about what you can do**
and mind your own boundaries!
- **You are not there to save anyone**
All you can do is listen, show you care, and help them find support.

Starting the conversation

If you think someone seems out of sorts, starting a conversation around mental health can give them a chance be listened to and express how they're feeling without the pressure of bringing it up themselves.

If you've noticed a friend or colleague seems down and you want to check in with them, you could start by saying something like:

**“You seem distracted lately.
Are you ok?”**

“I’ve noticed you don’t seem yourself recently, how are you doing?”

“I wanted to check in and see how you’re doing - is there anything you’d like to chat about?”

Finding the right moment

Talking about your feelings - especially if you're struggling - can be scary. Being in a safe space helps a lot. **Before you ask someone else to open up, ask yourself:**

☐ **Is this space private and comfy?**
It can be hard to talk if you feel awkward, uncomfortable, watched, or trapped.

☐ **Do we have enough time?**
If they do open up, you don't want to rush off right away.

☐ **Is this a moment where they're likely to feel safe?**
For example, are there people around who they may not want to seem upset in front of, like colleagues or partners?

Depending on who they are and when you ask, **they may not want to share with you how they're feeling, and that's ok.**

If they do share how they're feeling, it's important to avoid judgement and just **listen.**

How to listen



Once you've started a conversation with someone, it's important to listen.

It can be tempting to jump in. We often want to try and fix everything and come up with solutions. But when we do that, we are underestimating the power of **listening**.

If we listen without judgement, people can share how they're feeling and feel heard.

Listening can mean...

- **Taking a pause** - really hear what the other person is sharing. If there's silence, you don't need to rush to fill it.
- **Don't interrupt** - be patient, and let them form their thoughts in their own time.
- **Remembering you don't need to provide solutions** – just listening can help the person feel heard and think things through more clearly.

What to avoid



Don't try to cheer them up

Phrases like “it’s not that bad,” or “look on the bright side,” while well-meaning, can come across as dismissing their feelings.



Don't offer quick fixes

Someone’s problems may be news to you - but probably not to them. Chances are, if you come up with a simple solution, they’ve thought of it too. It might look easy - it isn’t.



Don't get angry or guilt-trip

Mental health issues aren’t due to a lack of effort or will - telling someone off or insisting they need to try harder won’t help. If you’re getting frustrated with them, step away.



Don't push too hard

However much you want to be helpful, it’s up to them when, how, and if they open up. Don’t tell them how they should feel, or insist they share when they don’t want to.

What's helpful?

Some things which can be more helpful than jumping to give advice:

Show that you're trying to understand their feelings

"That sounds like a lot to be going through, it makes sense that you would feel that way"

Check if they've got anyone who can support them

"Have you got people to talk about this with?"

Signpost them to resources and mental health support

(see pages 14-15 for ideas)

"If you're looking for support, have you heard about these services?"

Ask them what they need *(be clear about what you can and can't do)*

"Is there anything that would help?"

If you need to talk through ideas, I'm here."

Don't panic.



If somebody does open up to you about feeling distressed, remember:

**you don't need to be perfect,
you just need to try your best.**

Sometimes people think that just by bringing up things like depression, suicidal thoughts, psychosis, or other poor mental health, we might make it worse. **This is not true.**

You are not going to cause a mental health crisis by mentioning it. When done kindly and with care, an imperfect conversation about mental health is usually better than none at all. If someone is not struggling, or doesn't want your help, they can tell you so.

You may also have your own traumas and fears around the topics that come up. It's ok if you're not in a position to have the conversation just now. Take a breath, and check in with yourself about what you need.

Stay calm

Grounding exercises are a way to avoid being overwhelmed by difficult emotions by making sure you're focusing on the present moment. These can be helpful if you or the person you are talking to start to feel panicked or anxious.

**One grounding exercise you can try is the
5 Senses Scan.**

Name out loud or in your head:

5 things you can see

4 things you can hear

3 things you can touch

2 things you can smell/taste

Then take **1** deep breath,
and breathe out slowly.

Find more grounding exercises and other tools at
health-in-mind.org.uk/resources

Look after your own wellbeing

Talking through someone's struggles can be triggering, or take an emotional toll.

Here are some things you can try to help lighten any difficult feelings you may be left with after a conversation.

Ground yourself

Grounding exercises can help you focus on the present moment and feel more relaxed. Focus on calm breathing and come back to the here and now.

Move your body – going for a walk, stretching, or shaking it out can help you to relieve some of the tension you may feel in your body.





Notice what's happening with you

These conversations may bring up unexpected feelings, or trigger memories and responses from the past. Take the time to make sense of what's coming up for you.

Talk it out

Talk to someone you trust about how you're feeling. This can also help you think through what to do next. You may want to reach out to a support service yourself - check pg 14 or visit our site.



If you don't have anyone you can talk to right now, **write your feelings down.** Putting things into words can help you make sense of them.



Boundaries

It's important to know your limits in terms of the amount of support you can offer someone. You may feel comfortable having a talk with someone where you listen and signpost to further support, but not feel able to offer more long-term or involved support.

It can be helpful to communicate to the other person what you are and aren't able to support with. For example:

“I’m not a mental health professional so wouldn’t be able to give advice on that, but here are some places where you could get support.”

“I can’t be your main support with this, but if you need help reaching out, I can help you get in touch with [service]”

“I can’t be available all the time, but I can help with [specific bounded task] if that would be useful?”

Saying

NO

can be kind.



It can feel difficult to say no to people, especially when they're in distress.

But having clear boundaries is best for both you and them.

You are only one person. You can't give all the support someone might need, or take on a role you are not trained for. Trying to do that can harm both you and the person you want to help.

If you don't feel like you have the skills, energy, space, or time to offer the support they're looking for, **it's much more helpful for you to step back and help them connect with someone who can.**

Crisis support

Not everyone struggling with their mental health is in crisis, but if you think they may be an immediate risk to themselves or someone else, **do not try to deal with it alone.**

There is specialist crisis support available. Encourage the person in crisis to reach out, and, if possible, help them do so.

Who can you call?

Breathing Space

0800 83 85 87

NHS 24

111

Samaritans

116 123

**In an emergency, do not hesitate
to call 999**

If you feel able to, you can help by

- helping the person in crisis to make the call
- staying with them until they get through
- letting one of their family, close friends, or housemates know what's happening.

Specialist support in your local area

Health in Mind run mental health portals across the Lothians. Connect to local services, and get advice and guidance on all areas of mental health and wellbeing.



For support in Edinburgh:
ithriveedinburgh.org.uk

For support in Midlothian:
www.midspace.co.uk



For support in East Lothian:
www.Eastspace.org.uk

For support in West Lothian:

www.westspace.org.uk



Find more helpful resources at
health-in-mind.org.uk/resources

Get involved

You can also help people by supporting our work.

Some people find out about us because they have a friend who's fundraising for us, or they saw a collecting can in a local shop. Others are referred by people like you. Fundraising helps us get support where it's needed most - and it helps us keep making resources like this one.

You never know what might be going on for someone. But you can know the difference it makes to raise money for mental health.

Your donations help us provide one-on-one support and counselling, groups, classes, and so much more.

Even a small donation helps people access vital mental health support.



Share resources and support

As well as in-person support, we make resources and guides like this so you can share them with anyone who needs them.

Visit **health-in-mind.org.uk/resources** to see what's available.

Take action for mental health

Whether you walk, run, abseil, bake or game, taking on a fundraising challenge for Health in Mind doesn't only help us provide vital support - it's also a great way to start talking about mental health.

Leave a lasting legacy

Over 40 years, we've helped tens of thousands build and maintain better mental health. Leaving a gift in your will means you're supporting people for years to come.

Find out more and get in touch at
[health-in-mind.org.uk](https://health-in-mind.org.uk/get-involved)
[/get-involved](https://health-in-mind.org.uk/get-involved)





Health in Mind are a Scottish charity working with local communities to promote positive mental health and wellbeing. We support people to build resilience, hope, and wellbeing strategies on their own terms, at their own pace.

Get in touch to find out how we can help

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health-in-mind.org.uk

We rely on donations and fundraising to provide support in your community.

To help us work towards mental health for all, visit our website or give us a call.

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