

How can I talk to someone about their mental health?

If you're concerned about someone it can be difficult to know how to talk to them about their mental health. You may be worried that you don't know what to say or that you might upset them by bringing it up. You might also be worried about saying the wrong things. Follow our **TALKS technique** to help you start a conversation.

T **Take notice:** is your friend, relative or colleague acting differently? See our resource **What are the possible signs that someone is struggling with their mental health?** Remember that some people can try to cover the signs that they're experiencing difficulties but it might just seem that something's not right. It could be that there's no obvious reason why they might be struggling or they could be going through a difficult or stressful life event such as bereavement, relationship breakdown, money or work worries or becoming a parent, for example.

A **Approach and start a conversation:** you don't need to know whether someone has sought help or had any kind of diagnosis to ask them how they're feeling. Don't be worried that you will need to have all the answers, or, that you will need to know how to 'fix' whatever is wrong. Make sure you have time to chat and start with How are you doing? or How are things going? Sometimes people say they're alright at first when they're not - so you may need to gently coach them a little to open up. Let them know that it's ok to talk and you're there to listen. Ask open-ended questions (ones that can't be answered with 'yes' or 'no') that will help them to keep talking.

L **Listen without judgement:** it can be hard to talk about your mental health. It can make you feel exposed and vulnerable and your friend or relative may need to talk about difficult issues that are affecting them. It's very important to listen without judgement or criticism. Just showing you care and giving someone the space to talk about their feelings can be a huge help.

K **Keep listening:** and give gentle encouragement to let them talk. Don't dismiss what they're telling you, suggest that you know how they're feeling or tell them how lucky they are really. If you're concerned that they're having thoughts of suicide it's best to ask; talking about it makes it less likely to happen not more likely. See **I'm worried that a friend or relative is having suicidal thoughts. What should I do?** in the 'I am worried about someone' section.

S **Suggest help & Signpost:** it can be difficult to take the first step to get help. You could suggest they talk to their doctor (GP) and let them know that there's a mental health website for people in Leeds called MindWell which has information about:

- **Self-help:** you could discuss what might help, such as having a sleep routine, eating well, taking regular exercise, drinking less alcohol and feeling more connected with other people.
- **Support and Services in Leeds.** Offer to look at the website together if that would help.

Stay in touch: Don't worry that you don't have all the answers. It's important to acknowledge that there will be limits to the help you can offer. Showing that you care is the most important thing. Drop them a text, arrange a time to chat or a social outing. You could also offer to go along to a GP or wellbeing appointment with them for moral support. If they don't respond to your messages or calls or cancel meetings - keep letting them know you're there for them.