

## RISK

It is very important that if someone mentions to you that they are at risk of harming themselves or others, you seek medical help immediately either by telephoning the emergency services or by taking them to hospital. If possible, stay with them until the help arrives and avoid leaving them alone. Also, if someone discloses abuse to you or if you suspect there are any child protection concerns, it is vital that you contact the police or social services and follow the safeguarding policy within your service.

## SELF-CARE

Talking to someone about their mental health and hearing their stories can be emotional. It is therefore essential that if you feel affected by a conversation you have had, you too talk to someone about how you are feeling and take a break when needed.

## USEFUL WEBSITES

Some useful websites which aim to support adults, as well as children and young people struggling with their mental health are listed below:

### ADULTS

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)  
[www.time-to-change.org.uk](http://www.time-to-change.org.uk)

### CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

[www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)  
[www.annafreud.org.uk](http://www.annafreud.org.uk)



Charlotte Lowe  
*Psychological Services*



**Having a conversation with someone  
about their mental health**

## **ABOUT THEIR MENTAL HEALTH**

Having a conversation with someone about their mental health can seem daunting and many people often worry about what to say or believe that they may say the 'wrong' thing. Given how 1 in 4 adults and 1 in 8 children are diagnosed with a mental health illness, you never know when someone may decide to talk to you about their mental health and the support you offer can be extremely valuable.

Although there are no right or wrong answers of how to talk to people about their mental health, this short information sheet outlines things to think about when having a conversation with someone about how they are feeling.

## **LISTEN**

Often people just need a listening ear and want to share their stories, therefore just giving someone the space to talk can be very helpful. Thank them for sharing their story with you and remember that it's okay for you to not know what to say. Be honest about the fact you are unsure of what to say but direct them to further support whereby someone may be able to answer the questions they have.

## **NORMALISE MENTAL HEALTH**

We all have mental health and any one of us can go through times of difficulty. Mental health is best described as existing on a continuum: ranging from being emotionally healthy and having good mental health, with experiencing mental health problems in the middle, to receiving a diagnosis of a mental health illness existing at the opposite end of the scale.

## **STAY CALM**

Think of your body language: try not to react and stay calm if someone decides to have a conversation with you about their mental health. I know it can be difficult, however try to avoid displaying feelings of panic or surprise and make sure you take what they say seriously. By not reacting, people are more likely to be open with you about how they are feeling.

## **BE NON-JUDGEMENTAL**

Being non-judgemental and not making assumptions about people's experiences is very important. Display empathy and compassion wherever possible by replying with comments such as "I am sorry to hear that" and "it sounds like things have been really difficult for you".

## **LETTING LOVED ONES KNOW**

After listening to someone, encourage them to talk to a loved one about how they are feeling. Some people can find this challenging to do because they believe other people will judge them or they think have let people down. If they struggle to put into words how they are feeling suggest they write things down instead: through a letter, email or text message if easier. It's important for them to realise that it's okay for them to go through times of difficulty and that talking to those they trust can help.

## **ENCOURAGE SOCIAL CONTACT**

People can often feel very lonely when experiencing problems with their mental health. Try to encourage those who talk to you about their mental health to maintain contact with people they care about because this has proven to be helpful in maintaining positive mental health.

## **ACCESSING INFORMATION**

Remember to be patient as people may not want to seek help immediately and may seem reluctant to do so. However, encourage them to access reputable websites which provide information about mental health and provide useful self-help strategies which they could try. Examples of such websites are listed at the bottom of this guide.

## **GETTING PROFESSIONAL HELP**

Provide reassurance to people that although seeking help can seem scary, it is important to do because many people can fully recover from a mental health problem. Inform them that there are many different treatments available which they can access through their G.P. This includes medication and several psychological therapies, which can be delivered either face-to-face, online or in a group setting. Be realistic in terms of what you can do as it is up to the person to seek the support themselves.