



MOSAIC MENTAL HEALTH TIPS

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How To Talk To Your Friends About Your Mental Health

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Trying to understand your own mental health can be difficult in and of itself, let alone figuring out how to talk to your friends about mental health. However, having that support system can not only help in your mental health journey, it can strengthen the bond with the friends you choose to confide in.

Going into a conversation on mental health completely cold is never easy. There's rarely a simple, natural way to say, "Hey, how's it going? By the way, I have clinical depression. Anyway, how was your week?" I mean, you could do that. As someone with depression, I'd love if my friends were that open and upfront about their mental health. Bonding over therapy stories and antidepressant doses with my friends is one of the most cathartic parts of lunchtime catch-ups for me. Of course, those kinds of conversations aren't always the most fun, comfortable conversations to have, especially when you're having them for the very first time.

I spoke with Dr. Michele Kerulis over email about how to approach conversations about your mental health with your friends. Dr. Kerulis is a professor for Counseling@Northwestern, Northwestern University's online masters in counseling program. As an expert in both mental health and relationships, Dr. Kerulis has plenty of tips for broaching the subject of mental health.

"It can be nerve-racking to talk with friends about your mental health concerns," Dr. Kerulis says. "However, part of a solid friendship is providing support during tough times."

HERE ARE THREE WAYS YOU CAN START THAT CONVERSATION WITH A FRIEND:



1

FIND
RESOURCES AND
REFERENCES TO
BREAK THE ICE

2

GO IN WITH A
GOAL

3

TELL THEM
WHAT YOU NEED
FROM THEM



1 FIND RESOURCES AND REFERENCES TO BREAK THE ICE

"If you are having a hard time talking with your friends about your mental health concerns, one way to break the ice is to start a discussion, either in person or online, about an article that explores mental health," Dr. Kerulis says. "You can use this article as a way to introduce the topic and talk about your specific concerns."

In her article for Northwestern's blog on Counseling Awareness Month, Dr. Kerulis mentions Demi Lovato's recent documentary *Simply Complicated* in which Lovato openly talks about living with bulimia, anorexia, and addiction. You and your friends wouldn't be alone if Demi Lovato comes up more naturally in conversation than, say, mental illness. Finding people and places who are already having the conversations you want to have can provide a natural bridge for those conversations in your own friendships.

2 GO IN WITH A GOAL

Dr. Kerulis says to "go into the conversation with goals in mind." The goal can be as simple as letting your friend know about your mental health status, Dr. Kerulis says. "And another can be to talk about ways that your friends can support you." The goals don't have to be big and lofty like, "Solve depression and anxiety for myself and everyone." (If you do end up reaching that goal, please let the rest of us know ASAP.)

In fact, it's better if your goals start off as approachable as possible. Letting your friends know about a recent diagnosis or that you're thinking about starting therapy or switching medications may all seem rather small. However, they're significant steps in keeping your friends up-to-date on your life and well-being.

“

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3 TELL THEM WHAT YOU NEED FROM THEM

Of course, this is often easier said than done. Speaking from experience, it can be tough to let your friends know exactly what you need when you're feeling anxious or depressed, especially when you're deep in the throes of anxiety or depression. "If you experience depressive symptoms, you can describe your symptoms to your friends and ask them to keep you company when you feel down or go to an exercise class with you," Dr. Kerulis recommends. "Provide your friends with specific ways that they can be supportive so that they can better understand what helps you when you reach out to them."

Your friends love you and care about you — even the parts that are scary or gross and even the parts you may not love in yourself. Let them in. They will happily let you lean on them, which is something all of us can use at any point in our mental health journeys.

