



Scenarios

Share the following scenarios with your audience. In large or small groups, brainstorm ideas on what you can say or do. Talk about what makes the scenario difficult. What can you do to make the conversation effective and easier for both parties? Discuss as a large group and share some of the tips.

Remember: you won't leave here being an expert. The idea is to help you become more comfortable having these conversations. If the person you are talking to is in need of medical attention, you should always call 911.

Scenario 1:

You notice that your friend Jessica has seemed detached and disengaged during the past few months. She rarely comes to book club, and when she does, she doesn't say much. You're concerned about her. You ask her when you're alone if she's okay and she says she's been really depressed lately. What do you say?

Suggestions:

- "I'm so sorry. I've noticed that you haven't been your usual self."
- "Have you talked to your doctor lately about how you have been feeling? Are you seeing someone?"
- "I care about you and I am concerned. I will do whatever I can to help."
- Sometimes being there for a person means letting them decide when they are ready to talk or get help. Let Jessica know that you will be there for her when she is ready.

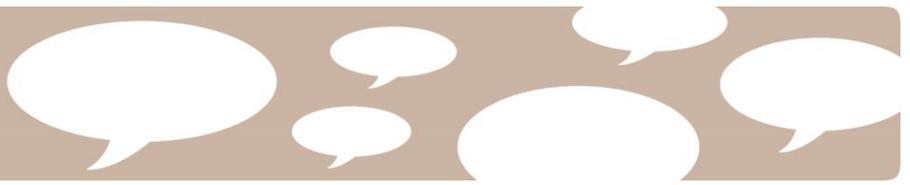
Scenario 2:

Your best friend from college comes over and says that he hasn't been feeling well lately. He says that he has been diagnosed with anxiety and sometimes it feels like his heart is pounding so hard it feels like he is having a heart attack.

In pairs, role play this situation. Have one person tell the other how they are feeling, and open up about their fears. Think about challenging or uncomfortable this conversation can be. How can you, as a friend, make this conversation easier?

Suggestions:

- Listen, don't try to change the subject.
- Don't judge, laugh or dismiss the conversation.
- Keep your friend talking, don't rush. It was very hard for him to have this conversation with you.
- Offer to take him to a doctor or a mental health professional.
- Ask him what helps him feel better. If it is something that you can do with him or help him with, offer to do so.
- Next time you see them, ask them how he is doing. Don't be afraid to follow up with him and see how he is doing.



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Scenario 3:

An acquaintance shares with you that they have a mental illness. You don't know them very well, but are concerned. What can you say and do?

Below are some general suggestions that you can say or do for anyone.

What you can say

- Thanks for opening up to me.
- Is there anything I can do to help?
- "Relapse is a part of recovery, not the end of it."
- "I'm sorry to hear that. It must be tough"
- "I'm here for you when you need me."
- "I can't imagine what you're going through."
- "Can I drive you to an appointment?"
- "How are you feeling today?"

What you can do

- **Don't try to play therapist.** Encourage them to get professional help. Offer to take them to a doctor or mental health professional.
- **Offer your support.** Mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety and bipolar disorder can make people feel isolated and alone. Offer to be there for them.
- **Listen.** Many people with mental illnesses feel like they don't have anyone to talk to. Open the lines of communication and try to make them feel comfortable.
- **Communicate effectively.** Be understanding and let them know you care. Don't judge, laugh, get angry or dismiss the conversation. Don't pretend there isn't a problem, but don't try to solve it either.
- **Offer practical support.** Cook dinner, arrange to go for a walk, make a date to see a movie or offer to run errands. Don't feel slighted if they don't take you up on your offer. Mental illnesses can be debilitating and people often feel exhausted. If you make an effort and they don't respond, don't give up. Keep letting them know you care.
- **Don't criticize or blame.** Realize that mental illnesses are real illnesses. You wouldn't criticize a heart patient, telling them to "stop having heart attacks! You could stop if you would just try harder!"
- **Be patient.** People with mental illnesses may have more bad days than good days. Don't give up on them.

Need more information?

You can receive more information and training on mental illnesses from the Minnesota chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Visit NAMIhelps.org for more resources, and a list of the current courses they are offering.