

# RESPONDING TO CONCERN

It can be hard to know what to say when someone you care for is hurting. Acknowledging other's emotional distress helps them feel cared for and heard. Don't be scared to make mistakes and say the "wrong" thing; what people normally need the most is emotional connection. We need someone who is going to hold hope when we can't hold it for our ourselves. So what do I do and say if I'm concerned about someone?

## Check in with Yourself

- » **Are you up to the task?**  
Are you in a place where you can handle someone else's mental health concern or do you need to seek your own care?
- » **Listen to your body:**  
Is your stomach upset? Your neck and jaw tense? Assess your physical needs and make an intentional plan to address needs while helping someone else.
- » **If you're not ready:**  
If you're not ready, have a go-to person standing by to support the person you care about.



## Response in Crisis

- » If you feel like your friend is in crisis, use reassuring language such as "I'm here. I care. I want to help. How can I help you?" or "Your life is valuable and worthwhile, even if it doesn't feel that way right now."
- » Ultimately, though, you should recognize that you can't handle this kind of situation alone. If your friend is suicidal, in extreme emotional distress, or otherwise making you fear for their health, call 911.
- » Don't allow fear that your friend will be upset stop you from seeking help for them. If you are getting to the point that you feel your friend needs to be safe, previous boundaries that were held in your relationship may need to be violated. Yes, your friend might be angry, but what matters most in this situation is their safety.


## Address the Concern

**Be Direct:** Use an assertive I statement such as “I am concerned about what you wrote.” “You don’t seem like your typical self.” “I can see that you’re in a lot of pain.” “Do you want to tell me what’s been going on?” Even if they’re not sure of exactly how you can help—or don’t need or want your help—simply asking can be meaningful.

**Stay calm:** You might feel angry that someone you care about is saying they may be hurting themselves. Reacting with anger can shut the conversation down. The person you care about needs your kindness.

**Hold the Humor:** People expressing emotions can be uncomfortable in the moment and tend to use humor to relieve discomfort. Sometimes humor can be disarming and send the wrong message.

**Encourage More than Advise:** Throwing out unsolicited opinions or suggestions can make your friend feel ostracized and more alone. Your advice might not actually be helpful or accurate. If asked for advice, frame your thoughts as an option rather than the solution.



**Show Respect:** People can feel really apologetic and embarrassed, which can add to their distress and make them less likely to speak about it. Let the person in your life know they don’t need to be apologetic or say sorry to you. You are there to listen and support them to find a way through.

**Get Physical:** Suggest activities the two of you can do together that you think may help, even if it’s as simple as going outdoors and getting some exercise or fresh air while on the phone with one another.

**Lean on Professionals:** “I will do anything I can, but I can’t help you alone. Can we get you some support?” Don’t just say “get help”, be willing to walk with the person through the whole help seeking journey.

