



TALKING ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH



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INTRODUCTION

Mental health issues are common, but stigma persists, with 57.8 million U.S. adults experiencing mental illness in 2021,¹ including 14.1 million with serious impairment.² Stigma causes discrimination, misunderstanding, reduced opportunities, harassment, inadequate insurance coverage, and hesitation to seek help. To promote well-being, we must break down barriers by normalizing mental health and providing support. This involves education, open conversations, and access to resources. By working together, we can improve mental health outcomes for everyone.

The repercussions of failing to normalize mental health are serious, including discrimination, misunderstanding, reduced opportunities, harassment, inadequate insurance coverage, and reluctance to seek treatment. It is crucial to address these issues and provide individuals with the support they need to manage their mental health.³ Through collective effort, we can create a society where mental health is no longer stigmatized, and individuals can access the resources they need to thrive.

NORMALIZE ASKING FOR SUPPORT

There's a lot you can do as an individual to change the dialogue around mental health. Taking care of your own mental wellness can be a powerful way to destigmatize mental health — steps like going to therapy, being attentive to your mental wellbeing, and being proactive about seeking support, can all make a difference.

When you talk to others about your mental health, don't feel shameful or like it's an off-topic subject. Just as you wouldn't feel self-conscious telling a friend you went to the doctor for a sprained ankle, mental health challenges don't need to be treated any differently.

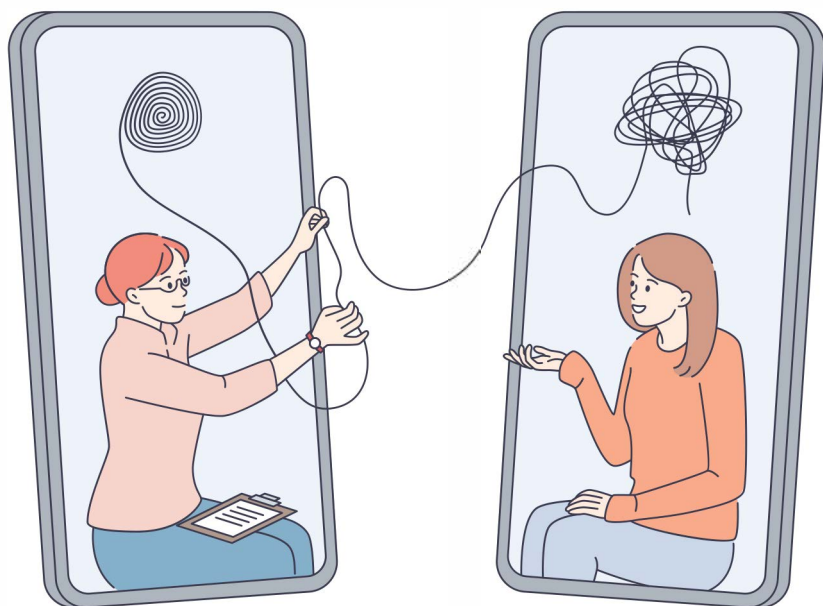
Get informed about mental health — when you're more educated you can productively further the conversation around mental wellness, learn how to better support yourselves and others, and feel more knowledgeable and comfortable discussing mental health topics.

If you're experiencing mental health challenges and are looking to reach out to someone for support but are not sure who to turn to, think about a trusted friend or family member who you feel comfortable talking to.

Choose a time when you're both able to focus on the conversation, and won't be rushed. If speaking with someone in person or on the phone feels too intimidating, consider texting them instead.

Due to the stigma of mental health, unfortunately there is a possibility that you may not receive the support you were looking for when you reach out to someone. If somebody has a negative reaction, don't take it personally and don't let it stop you from seeking support. Speak with another trusted individual who can help guide you towards treatment.

Talking to someone is just the beginning. You'll likely want to involve a professional who can help you to learn more about what you can do to better manage your mental health.



HOW TO SUPPORT OTHERS

There isn't one specific "right way" to help someone or to talk about mental health illnesses, however having an awareness and knowledge of mental health issues can help you to feel more confident in supporting others.

If you're concerned about someone's mental health, don't be afraid to discuss it with them, however, be respectful of their boundaries as well. Don't feel like bringing up their mental health needs to be a formal conversation — a casual setting, or even sending a text, may make the other person feel more at ease.

There are lots of ways you can show your support for someone who is struggling. Small gestures or acts of kindness can help let them know you're thinking about them. Learning about the mental health illness that they're dealing with can help you to better empathize and understand their situation, as well as help suggest treatment options if they turn to you for guidance.

If someone opens up to you about their mental health struggles, make sure to hone your listening skills. Listen without interrupting or judging them. Don't make light of the situation or of what they're saying. Ask open-ended questions and focus on their responses. Let them know if you get what they're going through, but don't shift the dialogue to yourself, keep it concentrated on what they're experiencing.

While mental health advice needs to come from professionals, you can give the individual guidance, validation, kindness, and a listening ear. Let them know that you're there to talk when they want to open up again, and that you're happy to go with them to appointments or help them find treatment — mental health is a journey, not just a single conversation.



LEADERS AND MENTAL HEALTH

If you're in a position of leadership, you can use your platform to destigmatize mental health illness and normalize dialogue around mental health. Some suggestions for using your role to progress mental health conversations include:

- Leaders shouldn't be afraid to open up about their own mental health and struggles they may have experienced, as well as the crucial connection between mental health and overall wellbeing. They can invite others to talk about their own mental health stories as well.
- Leaders can stay on top of their own mental health and stress levels, and take steps to lighten their load when they feel overstressed. They can also be attentive to the stress levels of others.
- They can let others know about available mental health resources, such as employee support groups, and reduce barriers to accessing those programs.
- They can create initiatives and perks that encourage healthy mind and body behaviors.

- They can ask their team what kind of support they need, listen to suggestions, and implement positive changes.⁴

Whether you're reaching out to someone else for mental health support, looking to support a loved one, or wanting to advance the mental health dialogue from a position of leadership, you can help to normalize mental health conversations. Through prioritizing your own mental health, speaking openly about challenges and struggles, and being proactive with educating yourself, you can help to destigmatize mental health illnesses.



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