



# Start a conversation

Mental health conditions including anxiety disorders, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, eating disorders, and phobias are very common. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, approximately 20-25% of the U.S. population suffers from a mental health condition at any given time, yet fewer than half receive treatment. Often, people avoid or delay seeking treatment because of stigma, or the fear that they will be treated differently for disclosing their mental health condition.

## Break the stigma

We all need someone to talk to when faced with challenges. Talking with someone about mental health may provide comfort, relief, or be a starting point for treatment. While these conversations may be uncomfortable at first, they are important and beneficial. The more people talk about mental health, the easier these conversations will become. Open dialogue will help everyone heal.



## Did you know?

Unmanaged mental health conditions may lead to impaired family and social relationships, unhealthy lifestyle behaviors, low self-esteem, depression, non-compliance with medications, and poor work performance.



# Four ways to start a conversation about your mental health

## Find someone you feel comfortable with

It's important that you find someone you feel comfortable opening up to and who you know will listen. This might be a friend, family member, colleague, community or religious leader, or doctor. Be clear with others about what you want from them, whether it's support, space, information, or guidance. Writing down your feelings ahead of time can help you process them and get a clearer idea of what you want to share.

## Talk in a familiar setting

Sometimes it's easier to talk about our feelings when we are doing something else, like driving in the car, walking around the park, or eating a meal. It's beneficial if these conversations happen at times and in places that feel natural.

## Start with a text, letter, or phone call

If a face-to-face conversation feels too intimidating, it's okay to start with a text, letter, or phone call. It could be as simple as sending a text message that says, "I have some important things on my mind and I'd like to talk to you about it."

## Be willing to seek professional help

Reach out to a mental health professional or your primary care provider if you are struggling. Be open and honest with your doctor or health care team so they can best support you. You can also find resources through your Employee Assistance Program (EAP). If you are in crisis and need to find help right away, call the crisis line or 911.

# Four ways to be a supportive friend, family member or colleague

## Listen and take them seriously

Actively listen by giving them your undivided attention. Let them finish sentences without interrupting and wait until they have finished to respond. Don't dismiss or downplay their feelings with comments like, "you're just having a bad day" or "I'm sure it's nothing."

## Be conscious of your language

Avoid using judgmental words like "weird" or "crazy" when someone explains how they are feeling. Pay attention to your non-verbal communication too like body language and tone of voice.

## Provide support and reassurance

Let them know you understand. If you've gone through something similar, tell them, so they know they aren't alone, but make sure you don't shift the conversation to yourself. Remind them that mental health problems are more common than people think, and they can affect anyone at any time. Emphasize that you care and make yourself available to talk again if needed.

## Offer to find and share information

Ask if they are aware of resources and offer to help find support groups, educational websites, or a mental health professional if they'd like assistance.



For information on your mental well-being benefits, visit

[ProvidenceHealthPlan.com/members](https://www.providencehealthplan.com/members)