**Conversation Guide: Talking to someone about mental health**

**Spotting the signs of poor mental health - notice the changes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical symptoms</th>
<th>Behavioural symptoms</th>
<th>Emotional symptoms</th>
<th>Cognitive symptoms</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Headaches</td>
<td>• Avoiding and blaming others</td>
<td>• Irritable</td>
<td>• Worrying about the past or future</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Muscle tension/ back ache</td>
<td>• Eating more, eating less or comfort eating</td>
<td>• Frightened</td>
<td>• Racing thoughts</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Tight jaw/ grinding teeth</td>
<td>• Using alcohol, substances or smoking</td>
<td>• Worried/anxious</td>
<td>• Panic attacks</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Raised heart rate/ faster breathing</td>
<td>• Snapping at others</td>
<td>• Angry</td>
<td>• Problems concentrating</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Changes in appetite</td>
<td>• Becoming more accident prone</td>
<td>• Feeling overwhelmed</td>
<td>• Memory lapses/ forgetting things</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Stomach problems</td>
<td>• Biting nails</td>
<td>• Fear</td>
<td>• Difficulty making decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Difficulty sleeping</td>
<td>• Self-harm</td>
<td>• Shame</td>
<td>• Unable to think clearly</td>
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**Dos and don’ts to having a supportive conversation**

**Do choose the right environment**
Consider who else is around and can potentially overhear the conversation – if on the phone or online, could you use headphones to allow for greater privacy? Ask them: where would you like to talk?

**Do give your full attention and listen without judgement**
Offer reassurance that you are there to listen.

**Don’t assume you know the answers**
You’re not expected to be an expert. If you don’t know what to say, remember that you don’t need to find an answer, or even understand their feelings. Listening will let them know you care.

**Don’t challenge, ignore or invalidate**
Don’t silver-line situations or try to make the person feel better. If someone says they feel worthless and we respond, “No you’re not, don’t be silly” we are invalidating what they have said.

**Don’t compare**
Sometimes we can draw up a story comparing their situation to someone else’s or your own. In some instances, this can show empathy, but it can also sometimes turn into you telling your story rather than listening to them.

**Do reflect back and clarify**
If someone says something that isn’t clear and you don’t know what they meant, repeat back what they have said and ask them to explain. Don’t put words in their mouth.

**Do show empathy rather than sympathy**
Empathic responses show that you’re trying to see where the person is coming from. Sympathy usually expresses pity, so say something like “That must be awful, I’m so sorry.” Instead of “I’m sorry for you.”

**Do empower the person**
Ask: “What do you think would help?” rather than tell them what you think would help. Give information rather than advice. This makes it empowering.

**Don’t try to find an easy solution**
What would help someone or what they want to happen will be different for everyone so don’t try to ‘fix’ or give advice as your first response.

**Don’t diagnose**
You are not in a position to diagnose a mental illness. This is not your role, even if you’ve gone through something similar yourself.

**Signposting**

**Learn more about mental health conditions**
As a first point of call, GPs are the main gateway to further support. Let them know that they can book a double appointment with their GP to discuss their mental health, so they don’t feel rushed. They can request for a family member or friend to attend the appointment with them.

**Find out more**
You could suggest our online community Clic. It’s monitored 24/7, so it’s a great way for people to connect with others and get peer support.

**Join Clic for free**
To find support in your local area, or if you or someone is experiencing a crisis, visit www.mentalhealth-uk.org/support-and-services/