

How to ask for help

It can be hard to talk about your mental health or struggles with substance use to someone else. You might be afraid of feeling like a burden. You might worry what they think about you, or that they won't understand. You might even feel like you don't have the words to accurately explain your struggle. If you feel this way, you're far from alone. But reaching out for support is an important step to take in feeling better—and it doesn't have to be difficult or uncomfortable.

Even if you feel as though you don't have a support person in your life, there's always someone you can turn to—from teachers and coaches to neighbors, religious leaders, and online communities. If you're looking for professional support, help is available when you need it—from therapists and counselors to doctors and support lines.

Things to Keep in Mind

The guide below offers tips and real-life scripts to help you start an important conversation about mental health and substance use. To make the most of the conversation guide, here are some things to keep in mind:



Don't wait to reach out.

Your feelings matter. Even if your struggle is temporary, it's real, and you deserve support. Pay attention to how you're feeling and get support when you're concerned about your emotions and behaviors.



Remember, people want to help.

Sometimes we feel like people don't have time for us. In reality, there are people who want to help. You just have to ask them.



Use the dialogue examples as a guide.

The scripts below are suggestions of things you might say, rather than words to memorize. Every person, situation and relationship is unique—which is why you should adapt the scripts to be authentic to you.



Talk to someone you feel comfortable with.

Sometimes we like to talk to someone we really know and trust; other times we prefer talking with someone less familiar who has more distance from the situation. No way is right or wrong as long as you're taking the step to ask for help.



Ease into it to make yourself more comfortable.

Start by talking about things you feel comfortable with, and move on to discussing how you feel when you're ready. It can also help to practice saying these things in the mirror before you reach out to someone in person. If you still don't feel ready for a face-to-face conversation, it may be easier to email, call or text your support person first.



Don't stigmatize yourself.

Mental health and substance use struggles are not a sign of weakness. Be compassionate toward yourself and remember: treatment is available and recovery is possible.



Manage your expectations and turn to different types of support.

Help comes in all different forms. The support that someone gives you may not be exactly what you need—and that's okay. This is normal and doesn't mean your relationships are flawed. It just means that you should seek support from multiple sources and cope in a variety of ways.



Conversations often go better than we anticipated.

Research has shown that many of us delay difficult conversations because we fear the worst—but that they have far better outcomes than we expect.



Prepare to reach out again.

This might not be a one-time conversation, but one brick in a longer path of connection. Set yourself up for success by approaching your mental health as a journey.



Support is available 24/7.

For emergency mental health help, call 911 or 988, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

For immediate substance use help, call SAMHSA's National Helpline, 1-800-662-HELP (4357).

These resources are free, confidential and available for everyone.

➔ **Get comfortable with asking for help.** Leaning on the support of others is one of the best ways to cope during a hard time. Asking for help does not make you weak. Be direct and let them know that you need their support.

"I've been feeling pretty low lately. I think I could really use your help."

"I want to cut back on my drinking, but I don't think I can do it alone."

➔ **Find time to talk.** Check to make sure that the person you're reaching out to is able to give you the support you deserve. Lastly, remember that there's no such thing as a 'perfect' time to talk. The important thing is simply to make the conversation a priority.

"I haven't been feeling my best lately. Can we have lunch this week to talk about it?"

"I've had some things on my mind that I need to get off my chest. Is there a good time to call you today?"

➔ **Show the person that you trust them.** When you tell someone why you chose to reach out to them, they become more invested in helping you feel better. It might also help them be more open about their own experiences.

"I know that you've been through this before..."

"You've always been such a good listener..."

➔ **Don't minimize the problem.** It may be hard to share personal details, but they won't be able to help if they don't know the reality of your struggle.

"I'm kind of worried about myself."

"I can't seem to stop drinking, no matter how hard I try."

➔ **Give concrete examples.** Use detailed examples to talk about how you've been feeling. Being specific will help the listener understand your experience and connect with your journey.

"Some days, I feel like I can't even get out of bed."

"I've been avoiding everything—including class and my friends."

➔ **Be specific about what help looks like for you right now.** When you're clear about what kind of support you need, you'll find your needs can be more easily met.

"I'm not ready to talk about solutions yet, but I sure could use a sympathetic ear."

"I want to stop depending on drugs to make me feel better, and I need some help finding treatment."

➔ **Look at this as an opportunity to connect with and help others.** When you ask others how they're doing, you might discover that you're experiencing similar struggles. By sharing your personal story, you create opportunities to mutually support one another.

"Thanks for listening. How have you been lately?"

"Have you ever felt this way before?"

Download additional information on how to ask for help here:

mentalhealthtx.org/check-in/HHS_Guide_How_to_Ask_for_Help_MoreInfo.pdf

