

WELL BALANCED

- OCTOBER 2026 -
Mental Health Awareness

HOW TO *Start* THE *Conversation*

A simple check-in can mean more than we realize. World Mental Health Day, recognized on October 10, is a reminder that mental health is part of everyone's overall well-being.

While conversations about mental health are becoming more common, stigma can still make it hard for people to speak up or ask for help. Learning how to approach these conversations with care, respect, and compassion can make a meaningful difference for ourselves, our families, our friends, and our coworkers.

What Mental Health Really Means

Mental health is more than the absence of a mental health condition. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines it as a state of well-being that helps people cope with the stresses of life, recognize their abilities, learn and work well, and contribute to their communities. It also shapes how we think, feel, act, and relate to others. A person may experience mental health challenges without having a diagnosed condition, and someone living with a mental health condition can still experience well-being, growth, and fulfillment with the right support and treatment.

Why Talking About Mental Health Matters

Mental health conditions are common, affecting about one in five adults in Canada and the United States and more than one billion people worldwide, according to the World Health Organization. They can include depression, anxiety, ADHD, panic disorder, and many others, and they may be short-term or ongoing. Because mental health affects so many people in different ways, respectful conversations can help reduce stigma, encourage earlier support, and remind people they are not alone.

Signs Someone May Need Support

It is not always easy to tell the difference between a temporarily difficult period and signs that someone may need mental health support. Mental health challenges can look different from person to person, but noticeable changes in mood, behavior, energy, relationships, or daily functioning may be signals that someone is struggling, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).

Common signs may include:

- **Changes in mood or thinking.** Persistent sadness, excessive worry or fear, confusion, trouble concentrating, intense irritability, or extreme mood shifts.
- **Changes in behavior or relationships.** Withdrawing from friends or activities, difficulty relating to others, increased substance use, or struggling to manage everyday responsibilities.
- **Changes in physical habits.** Shifts in sleep, appetite, or energy, as well as ongoing physical symptoms without a clear cause.
- **Signs of serious distress.** Feeling overwhelmed or isolated, expressing thoughts of suicide or self-harm, losing touch with reality, or being unable to carry out daily activities.



Did You Know?

Suicide is the leading cause of death for people aged 10-34 years. The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline offers 24/7 judgment-free support for mental health, substance use, and more.



Did You Know?

No single factor predicts mental health outcomes. Risk factors such as unstable housing, limited access to health care or education, poor emotional well-being, or limited coping skills may increase the likelihood of a mental health condition. Protective factors such as strong relationships, social support, and safe communities can help reduce risk.

How to Start the Conversation

If you believe someone may be struggling with their mental health, approach the conversation with care, patience, and genuine concern. A supportive check-in from a friend, family member, or coworker can help someone feel less alone and may encourage them to seek the support they need.

Below are a few suggestions to consider.

- **Lead with care:** Share what you've noticed using observations, not assumptions, and let the person know you are checking in because you care.
- **Use simple conversation starters:** Try phrases such as "I've been worried about you. Can we talk?", "What can I do to help?", or "I care about you and want to listen."
- **Choose the right time and setting:** Find a private, comfortable space, minimize distractions, and be patient, open-minded, and present.
- **Listen more than you talk:** Practice active listening, avoid trying to fix or solve, and give the person space to share what they need.
- **Respond without judgment:** Validate their feelings, show empathy, and ask what would feel most helpful to them.

What to Avoid: These conversations can be sensitive, so choosing words carefully matters. Avoid minimizing someone's experience with comments such as "everyone gets stressed," telling them to "just stay positive," comparing their situation to someone else's, or making assumptions about what they need.

Encouraging Professional Help

Encourage support in a caring, nonjudgmental way and remind the person that asking for help is a sign of strength. You do not need to have all the answers. If they need more support than you can provide, help connect them with a trusted professional, resource, or emergency support.

Take any talk of self-harm or harming others seriously. Ask direct questions if you are concerned, and if there is an immediate safety concern, stay with the person and connect them with professional help or emergency resources right away.

Showing up, listening with care, and knowing when to connect someone with more support can help them feel less alone and take steps toward getting them the help they need.

Resources

- » 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline ([samhsa.gov](https://www.samhsa.gov))
- » World Mental Health Day ([who.int](https://www.who.int))

Sources

- » <https://www.cdc.gov/mental-health/about/index.html>
- » <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>
- » <https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/what-is-mental-health/how-to-talk>
- » <https://cmha.ca/find-info/mental-health/general-info/fast-facts/>
- » <https://www.nami.org/warning-signs-and-symptoms/>

