

# Supporting Your Friends

## Things to do.

## Things to not do.



"Are you O.K.?  
Are you sure?"

### Notice

Caring is never wrong - it's always ok to ask. Having someone notice our pain helps us realize we aren't alone.

"It seems like you  
are feeling \_\_\_\_.  
Have I got that right?"

### Listen to Understand

Try to figure out why the feelings actually make sense in their situation. Check with them to see if what you think you're beginning to understand is accurate.

"You don't need to  
feel that way."

### Talk them out of their feelings.

Your friend is carrying strong feelings and may not be thinking clearly, but trying to talk them out of their feelings or correct their thinking will only leave them feeling misunderstood. Let them get their feelings out without judging how valid you think they are. Offer your perspective only after you take time to listen.

"I will drop everything when  
you need me. I will get  
you through this."

### Become their life preserver

Being available 24/7, putting your own life on hold, not taking care of your needs, or feeling guilty about good things in your life. These are all signs that you may be putting yourself in a role that feels helpful but is actually keeping your friend stuck and powerless.

"It must be so hard to carry  
these thoughts and  
feelings."

### Realize

Take time to recognize the strength it takes to push through hard times and not give up. Let them know that they are walking a difficult path and you appreciate them courageously talking about it.

"Is there something I can  
do? Are there others  
supporting you?"

### Find out.

Don't walk away and forget to do what they've asked. If their request is more than what you can manage, offer something you are able to do. That might start with offering to help them figure out where help can be found.

"You're not even trying"  
"You should be over this by now"  
"All you need to do is ..."

### Pressure them to be better

Because it's hard to see our friends having a tough time, we can sometimes put harmful pressure on them to hurry up and get better. This isn't helpful and can often add shame to the despair they are feeling, pushing them even further away from health and wholeness.

"Let's do something to give  
you a break from this heavy  
stuff you're carrying."

### Refocus

Remind your friend that they are more than this situation - it is a place they are passing through not who they are. You can bring bits of "normal" into this difficult time by making sure that their difficulties are not the only focus of your friendship.

"Do you mind if I  
check back about  
this again?"

### Remember

Hard times make us feel alone. Put an alarm on your phone reminding you to check in regularly. Continue to include your friend in your plans so they will know they aren't forgotten.

### Tell everyone... or tell no one

Treat your friend the way you would want to be treated. You have been trusted and need to protect that. But caring for your friend also means knowing when they need help beyond what your supportive friendship can do. Holding secrets can put your friend - and you! - in a dangerous place. Good friends get help!

"..." "Blah, Blah, Blah..."

## Depression

Absence of hope, not opposite of happiness

**Know:** It feels like all that exists is the immediate moment and if that feels horrible it's hard to believe that life will ever be different than this.

**Say:** "It seems like things are dark and heavy right now. What do you need that I can help with today?"

**Try:** Help your friend find and gather reminders that goodness and hope are still part of their lives by collecting photo's, songs, art, memories. And don't stop inviting them along - even if they never come.

## Anxiety

Fears tell feelings that life is dangerous

**Know:** Fearful feelings have overpowered logic. Trying to talk someone out of the worry and dread without caring for the feelings rarely helps.

**Say:** "It looks like you're feeling anxious and I don't mind. Can I just hang out here with you?"

**Try:** Help your friend create a list of things they can do to wake up the logical, concrete side of their brain when the anxious feelings start to overpower it - like noticing and naming things around them that they can see, touch, smell, hear and know.

## Self-harm

Communicates inner pain too big for words

**Know:** Self-harm isn't the same as being suicidal. It is an attempt to manage pain inside that feels like it's too big to be contained.

**Say:** "I'm amazed at the amount of pain you must be carrying inside. I'm willing to listen if you'd like to talk about it."

**Try:** Help your friend to recognize what things trigger their self-harm and to brainstorm a list of alternatives for calming and distracting their feelings when the urge for harm comes.