

# WHAT WORKS

## for young people when supporting friends

This resource is a list of tips heard from young people as part of the study *Being there: Young People supporting their friends through tough times*. They're suggestions directly for young people on what you might want to consider when helping your friend. They're also useful for mental health professionals, educators and parents to consider when supporting young people who are helping their friends. As we heard from young people, there is not just one way to provide support, and these are a guide for things you might want to consider.



### 1 Take care of yourself first

If you want to be a good friend, you need to take care of yourself first. Supporting someone can be draining and take its toll on your mental health. And that isn't good for you or your friend. Check in with yourself and consider what you need, do the things that make you feel good, and make the time to recharge.

### 2 Show them you're someone who cares

Your friend may not need support right now, or they may not be ready to talk. But you can show them you're someone they can talk to by modelling support to others, being open about what you're going through, and letting them know you're there if they ever need help.

### 3 Casual check-ins

When you're worried about your friend but they aren't ready to talk or don't know how to, try adding a casual check-in when chatting. Do it in a place they feel comfortable or go for a walk so they don't need to make awkward eye contact, or lead into it off some other random chat. Remembering what is going on for them in their lives and asking specific questions can also help. You might just get them to open up.

### 4 Ask them what they need

When your friend is going through a tough time you can't know exactly how to help all the time. And that means you might end up doing the wrong thing, or not doing anything at all. Remember they will generally know what is best for them, so you can always just ask, 'What do you need from me right now?'

### 5 Be there for them in the future

Sometimes your friend might not be ready to talk just yet. If that happens you can always ask if you can check back in with them later. Or let them know you are available if they ever want to talk about it. This gives them time to process and work out what they feel and what they want to say as well.

### 6 Mostly listen and know when to give advice

Most of the time when a friend is going through a tough time they just need someone who can listen. When a friend does open up it can be tempting to just dive straight in and give advice and end up doing most of the talking. This can make them feel like you think their problem isn't a big deal and can stop them from reaching out to you again. The most important thing to do is to listen, be curious, ask questions and only give advice if they ask for it, or if it feels comfortable to do so. If it's the right timing, you might want to share with them your own experiences. You can always ask them if they want to hear about your experiences or advice.

### 7 Don't do it alone

It can sometimes feel like helping your friend is all on you, and you are alone. Taking on sole responsibility can be isolating, and if things don't improve it can start impacting your mental health too. It's important to share responsibility. Talk to someone about it who you trust, who isn't involved in the situation and who you know can keep it confidential, and encourage your friend to do the same.

### 8 Encourage them to get help from a supportive adult

Sometimes during tough times you might need help from a supportive adult – this could be parents, teachers, community members, coaches, religious leaders, friends, family members or a professional. This option is always available and it's never too early to reach out for support. Get to know what services are available and encourage your friend to access them.

### 9 Navigating the world of professional help

Sometimes there are barriers to accessing professional services, so it's good to check in with what services are available and if they meet your friend's needs – such as being aware of cultural needs, if it's LGBT+ friendly, or if there's a big waitlist. If your friend doesn't want you to do this, try to understand why, and work through what the barriers might be. If you're comfortable, sometimes helping them book an appointment with a counsellor, or attending their first

session with them will be the help they need to start that journey. It can take a few times reaching out for support to find the right fit at times, and that's okay. There are great avenues for support both in person and online, and reminding your friend to keep going can make a huge difference.

### 10 You can't fix everything, but you can be there

Sometimes just being there for your friends is all you can do. This might not mean always having big emotional chats, but could be as simple as doing things they enjoy, having fun, sending them memes, and distracting them from the tough times they are going through.

