



Change the Conversation

with NAMI Austin

Talking to a friend or family member about mental health doesn't have to be awkward or intrusive — you're showing people that you care about their wellbeing. That gesture can be life changing!

Follow these steps to start the conversation.

1. Remember these mental health facts

- 1 in 5 Americans experience a mental illness, so it's common.
- Mental health conditions are brain-based disorders, not personality failings.
- In 90% of suicides, there's an underlying untreated mental illness at play. The earlier people receive treatment, the less likely they are to face crisis.
- Success rates for mental illness are similar to other health issues. The good news is people can achieve health and wellness!

2. Know the common warning signs

- Excessive worrying or fear
- Feeling very sad for more than two weeks
- Confused thinking or problems concentrating and learning
- Extreme mood changes
- Prolonged or strong feelings of irritability or anger
- Isolation: avoiding friends and social activities
- Changes in sleeping or eating habits or sex drive
- Difficulty perceiving reality: hearing, seeing or believing things that are not real
- Repeated abuse of alcohol or drugs
- An intense fear of weight gain or concern with appearance
- Thoughts or acts of self-harm including plans to kill oneself
- Inability to carry out daily activities or handle daily problems and stress

3. Find a comfortable space to address your concerns

- Ask questions in a time and place where the person feels comfortable. This should be a neutral location, away from other family, friends or co-workers.
- You are there as a friend, not a mental health expert. It's ok to not know what to say or do next.
- By asking someone if they are ok, you are *not* making their wellbeing your sole responsibility. But you may be able to help them get the help they need.

4. Ask questions and actively listen

Often, people experiencing the onset of a mental health issue feel completely alone. Actively listen and look for opportunities to share the mental health facts you've learned. Never underestimate the power of simply being there. Here's some questions you can try:

- I've noticed that you're [sleeping more, eating less, etc.]. Is everything okay?
- I am concerned about your safety. Have you thought about harming yourself?
- I care about you and want to listen. What do you want to share about how you're feeling?
- It seems like you're going through a difficult time. How can I help you?
- Who or what has helped you in the past?
- Can I help connect you to a counselor or community resource that can help you?

5. Follow up and get mental health help

- You are not alone. If someone shares they need help, there are numerous community resources available. Visit namiaustin.org/crisis or namiaustin.org/resources for local, phone and online resources.
- Call 911 if you think they're in danger of harming themselves or others.