

How to have wellbeing conversations and empower others to seek appropriate support

Is someone you work with showing signs of a mental health issue or emotional distress? Would you like to check in with this person through a private, empathic conversation and possibly encourage them to seek professional and social support?

Wellbeing is individualised and can be interpreted differently among cultures. Consider the local and individual's traditions, values, and beliefs to ensure appropriate and safe support is offered. Further, consider any identity-related needs that you should be aware of relating to e.g., gender, disability status, race, ethnicity, class.

Note: This note does not make you a psychologist, counsellor, or mental health professional. This guide has been designed to promote open dialogue around wellbeing and help individuals seek further professional help. Please reflect on the following questions prior to having a conversation around a person's wellbeing.

Am I ready?

- Am I in a good headspace?
- Am I willing to genuinely listen to my colleague/ participant?
- Can I give them as much time as they need?
- Am I aware of the cultural beliefs and potential barriers of mental health within the community?

Am I prepared?

- Do I understand that if I ask someone if they are OK, their answer might be "No, I am not"?
- Am I ready to hear their response if they are not OK?
- Do I know what to do next if someone tells me that they are not OK?
- Do I understand that I am not the right person to offer specific advice and support on 'fixing' someone's mental health problems?
- Do I know what localised professional services, community services, support groups or crisis services are available if needing to refer someone for appropriate support? ([Click here](#) for a service mapping document that you can adapt and use in your setting).
- Will I accept that they might not be ready or willing to talk to me?

What to do if someone discloses abuse in your conversation

Do

- Be relaxed, friendly and show concern
- Listen attentively
- Reassure the person that it was right to tell you
- Immediately seek help if medical care is needed
- Let them know that, with their consent, you will forward the report to your manager / the necessary person in your organisation
- Write down what the person disclosing has told you
- Seek help for yourself if you need support

Do not

- Try to deal with the incident yourself
- Ask leading questions or push for information
- Make assumptions or offer alternative explanations
- Diminish the seriousness of the behaviour or allegation
- Shut down the person or interrupt
- Withhold the information because the subject of complaint is a friend
- Don't make promises about how the case will progress

Have I picked the best moment?

- Talking to someone about their mental health and wellbeing is a big step.
- Are we somewhere relatively private where our conversation won't be overheard?
- Is this a good time for them to talk? Have I allowed enough time to have a discussion?

Now that you're ready, take these steps:¹

1. Look out for any crises or immediate risks. Make sure that the person is not at risk of harming themselves or others.
2. Listen without expressing any judgement. Help your colleague to have the conversation by asking questions and being specific. Try asking "How are you?" or "You seem less chatty than usual. Is everything OK?"
3. Give support and information. Offer emotional support and practical help with tasks. Ask the person if they would like information about mental health problems. You could ask questions like "How would you like me to support you?" or you could say "You might want to talk with someone who can support you."
4. Encourage the person to get appropriate professional help (where available).
5. Encourage the person to use self-help strategies and to take care of themselves.

¹ Adapted from Mental Health First Aid Infographic in [Psychological first aid: Guide for field workers](#).