

TIPS:

How To Talk about Mental Illness with Family, Friends, and Colleagues

Here are some helpful tips to keep in mind when speaking to those who live with a mental health condition. It's important to help them feel respected, empowered, and heard.

1. Avoid Equating Them to Their Diagnosis

Communicate that their identity is not their condition.

- ❌ **DO NOT USE:** "Mary is depressed"
- ✅ **USE:** "Mary has depression"



2. Avoid Insensitive Terms

Be mindful of the language you use.

- ❌ **DO NOT USE:** "Mentally disabled", "Mentally handicapped"
- ✅ **USE:** "Has a mental illness" or "Has a mental health condition"



3. Avoid Terms that Suggest Pity

Try not to treat them as a victim, but instead focus on their strength in seeking help.

- ❌ **DO NOT USE:** "Suffering from", "Afflicted with", or "Victim of"
- ✅ **USE:** "has a history of," "is being treated for," or "lives with"



4. Avoid Offering Solutions

- ❌ **DO NOT USE:** Try not to offer solutions if they don't ask for it, you are not a counselor
- ✅ **USE:** Try to just listen to their pain without judgement



5. Express Support with Words

- ✅ Use language to convey understanding, support, and an eagerness to listen
- ✅ Let them know that their struggle does not change how you view or feel about them
- ✅ Tell them that you care but avoid sharing how much it hurts you to see them struggling

6. Share but Do Not Compare

- ✅ Share some of your own challenges to create a safe space for them to open up to you. However, avoid making comparisons between your struggle and theirs



7. Acknowledge and Validate

- ✅ Acknowledge that what they are going through is difficult
- ✅ Normalize mental illness by telling them that many people struggle with their mental health at some point in their life and it's nothing to feel ashamed of
- ✅ Show that you understand they have an illness much like any other, but do not be dismissive or trivialize what they are going through