

## How to Help a Friend

### 1. Know the warning signs

You know more about what's going on in your friends' lives than anyone else. This puts you in the best position to know if one of your friends needs help. Below is a list of warning signs to look out for:

- Feeling sad or withdrawn for more than 2 weeks
- Trying to harm or end one's life or making plans to do so
- Severe, out-of-control, risk-taking behavior that causes harm to self or others
- Sudden overwhelming fear for no reason, sometimes with a racing heart, physical discomfort or difficulty breathing
- Throwing up, using laxatives or not eating to lose weight; significant weight loss
- Seeing, hearing or believing things that are not real
- Excessive use of alcohol or drugs
- Drastic changes in mood, behavior, personality or sleeping habits
- Extreme difficulty concentrating or staying still leading to physical danger or failing at school
- Intense worries or fears that get in the way of daily activities

For more information about the symptoms of mental health conditions, check out the following websites: [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org) and [www.teenshealth.org](http://www.teenshealth.org).

### 2. Share your concerns

If you notice any of the above warning signs or if you're concerned one of your friends is thinking about suicide, don't be afraid to talk to them about it.

#### Start the Conversation

- Before you start the conversation, have a list of resources, like the ones on your Ending the Silence resource card, that your friend can use to get help.
- Open the conversation by sharing specific signs you've observed.
  - "I've noticed lately that you [haven't been sleeping, aren't interested in soccer anymore, which you used to love, are posting a lot of sad song lyrics online, etc.]..."

If you think your friend may be thinking about suicide, ask the direct question, saying something like:

- "Are you thinking about suicide?"
- "Do you have a plan? Do you know how you would do it?"
- "When was the last time you thought about suicide?"

If your friend answers "Yes" to these questions or if you think they might be at risk of suicide, you **NEED** to talk to an adult you trust **IMMEDIATELY**, or call the National Suicide Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or 911.

#### Listen, express concern, reassure

Focus on being understanding, caring and nonjudgmental, saying something like:

- "You are not alone. I'm here for you"
- "I may not be able to understand exactly how you feel, but I care about you and want to help"
- "I'm concerned about you and I want you to know there is help available to get you through this"
- "You are important to me; we will get through this together"

#### What not to do

- Don't promise secrecy. Say instead: "I care about you too much to keep this kind of secret. You need help and I'm here to help you get it"
- Don't ask in a way that indicates you want "No" for an answer.
  - "You're not thinking about suicide, are you?"
  - "You haven't been throwing up to lose weight, have you?"

## What not to say

- We all go through tough times like these. You'll be fine."
- "It's all in your head. Just snap out of it."

### **3. Get help**

If your friend is experiencing warning signs of a mental health condition, encourage him or her to **TALK TO A TRUSTED ADULT**. In addition, let your friend know about resources they can turn to for anonymous support and information.

#### Online Resources

- [www.OK2TALK.org](http://www.OK2TALK.org) – An online forum for teens and young adults to talk about what they're experiencing by sharing their personal stories and motivational quotes and images
- [www.suicideispreventable.org](http://www.suicideispreventable.org) – For more information on how to talk to a friend about suicide
- Resources listed under Know the Warning Signs for additional information and support

#### Talk to Someone

- Crisis Text Line: Text "NAMI" to 741741
- Teen Line: open 9 p.m. – 1 a.m. ET 310-855-4673 or text "TEEN" to 839863 (8:30 p.m. – 12:30 a.m. ET)
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

#### Apps

- Mindshift –helps teens and young adults cope with anxiety
- My3 – helps youth stay connected with their support network if having thoughts of suicide
- MoodKit – helps improve your mood by developing self-awareness and healthy attitudes
- Take a Break! Guided Meditations for Stress Relief – helps you cope with stress

### **4. Be a good friend**

One of the most important factors in recovery is the understanding and acceptance of friends. Below is a list of ways you can help a friend who is experiencing symptoms of a mental health condition:

- Include your friend in your plans – continue inviting him or her, even if they turn down your invitation
- Help your friend stay positive
- Don't treat him or her differently
- Stand up for your friend
- Check-in regularly, listen and offer support
- Learn more about mental health (see websites listed throughout this document)

### **5. Reduce stigma**

Stigma is the biggest reason people don't try to get help. By taking steps to reduce mental health stigma in your school and community, you can help your friend feel more comfortable speaking up when they need support. The sooner your friend gets help, the greater their chances of getting better will be. Below is a list of things you can do to help reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness and end the silence:

- Talk about mental health with friends & family
- Share links to resources on social media
- Don't bully, stereotype or label others
- Call people out if they use stigmatizing language
- Use people first language
  - If you speak to or about a person with a mental health condition, speak to the person first, and then the mental health condition. Ex: Instead of "a bipolar person," say "a person with bipolar disorder"
- Wear a lime green ribbon to raise mental health awareness and let people with a mental health condition know they're not alone