

Checking in with Friends

Being a teenager can be tough in today's fast-paced and ever-changing world. The pressures of school, social life, and the uncertainties of the world can create a lot of anxiety, worry, or stress. Knowing what to say or do to support your friends' mental well-being can be challenging. When we're feeling stressed or anxious, knowing someone is supportive can mean so much, even if it may not make the stressful situation disappear. We can show up for each other in small ways that make all the difference! Here are some ideas for teens to check in on the mental well-being of those around them.

START WITH EMPATHY

Empathy is the cornerstone of effective peer support. When you approach a friend who seems stressed, start by acknowledging their feelings. Say something like, "I can see that you're going through a tough time, and I'm here for you." This simple act can make a big difference.

LISTEN ACTIVELY

Sometimes, all someone needs is a listening ear. Ask open-ended questions like, "How are you doing today?" And genuinely listen to their response. Wait to interrupt or offer solutions. Let them express themselves at their own pace and in their own words.

Show them you are listening by nodding, looking up every once in a while, and leaning in. Do your best to avoid showing large reactions on your face or through your body language that might convey big feelings and emotions. Sometimes, body language can discourage people from continuing to share their stories.

TIME & PLACE ARE IMPORTANT

Consider when and where you check in with friends, as they may not be willing to talk if others are around or if their mind is on other things.

RESPECT BOUNDARIES

Some people may not be ready to open up about their feelings, and that's okay. Respect their boundaries and tell them you're available when they're ready to talk.

AVOID JUDGEMENT

Remember that everyone's experiences and challenges are unique. Avoid passing judgment or making assumptions about what your friend is going through. Instead, offer your support without conditions.

SHOWING UP MATTERS

Simply sitting with your friend can be a form of support. You don't always have to have the right words. Similarly, sometimes situations arise where we don't know what to say. Rather than avoiding the person or situation, it's okay to say, "I'd like to be here for you, but I'm not sure what to say." You can even ask, "What do you need right now? Space? Go for a walk? To talk about something outside of the situation?"

NORMALIZE SEEKING HELP

Let your friends know it's okay to seek help from a trusted adult and/or a mental health professional when needed. Share information you know about resources available at school or in the community, like school counselors or mental health clinics.

TIME & PLACE ARE IMPORTANT

Consider when and where you check in with friends, as they may not be willing to talk if others are around or if their mind is on other things.

STAY CONNECTED

In today's digital age, staying connected is easier than ever. Send a text message, make a call, or simply spend time together doing activities you both enjoy. Connection can help alleviate stress and boost overall well-being.

EMBRACE DIFFERENCES

Our world is diverse, and cultural backgrounds play a big role in how people understand and talk about mental health. Be sensitive to these differences, and take time to learn about various cultural norms and practices related to well-being.

ENCOURAGE SELF-CARE & COMMUNITY-CARE

Encourage your friends to engage in self-care activities that promote mental well-being. This might include exercise, meditation, journaling, or taking breaks when needed.

Even better, you can do them together, if they are interested or you can do something helpful or supportive for them which is called community care. This might mean taking a walk together, playing a game together, or even sitting out in the sunshine or fresh air.

SHARE RESOURCES

If you come across videos, news articles, blog posts, or books related to mental health that have helped you, share them with your friends.

Just like how easy it is to stay connected, sharing resources is simple as well. Knowledge is a powerful tool in promoting understanding and coping. As a quick tip, consider the credibility of the source before you share resources.

SEEK SUPPORT FOR YOURSELF

Remember that supporting a friend through their challenges can feel like a lot emotionally. Don't hesitate to seek support from trusted adults, such as parents, teachers, coaches, or school counselors, if you're feeling overwhelmed.

KNOW YOUR LIMIT

Peer support is incredibly helpful at relieving stress and providing support, but in emergency situations that endanger the life of your friend, keep them safe by calling or texting the suicide and crisis lifeline at 9-8-8 or for the TrevorLifeLine which is dedicated to helping LGBTQIA teens and young adults call 966-488-7396 or text START to 678-678. 9-1-1 can also be utilized, especially in a medical emergency or crisis involving drugs and alcohol. Should you reach out to one of these resources for support, tell a trusted adult that this happened.

TAKING A BREAK

It's okay to take a break from being the helper. Taking time for yourself to do self-care, rest, or exercise ensures you're also supporting yourself. Remember, it all starts with empathy and self-compassion, and that includes ourselves!

There are so many ways teens can show up for others and themselves. By being a supportive friend, you can make a positive impact on the mental health and well-being of those around you. Together, we can navigate the world with kindness and compassion.