

How are you?

**“I’m doing all right.
But there’s someone
I’m worried about.”**

**Talking helps.
Conversation tips**

“I’m fine. But there’s someone I’m worried about.”

Have you ever noticed that your partner, a friend, a family member, a colleague or employee has not seemed to be himself/herself for several weeks or months? Mental strain sometimes becomes more and more of a burden, playing an increasingly central role in the affected person’s everyday life.

If you notice that the person you’re worried about:

- is withdrawn and no longer talks to people
- often can’t concentrate or reacts irritably
- stays in bed all day or can’t sleep at night
- seems to have changed, or to be sad
- has trouble keeping up at school or in the workplace
- is working more slowly or making more mistakes
- often calls in sick or gets in late

then it’s time to take action.

The first step towards alleviating anxieties and negative feelings is to talk about them. You shouldn’t expect everything to change immediately after your conversation, but having someone who listens and is interested and sympathetic brings relief and hope: a trouble shared is a trouble halved. Uncertainty and anxiety about having to solve the problems they bring up puts many people off talking about them. If you came across someone with an inflamed appendix, it wouldn’t occur to you to remove it yourself – and nor are you expected to be able to cure depression, for example. Your sympathetic ear and your interest give the help that’s needed.

Before the conversation

Consider your own mood.

Don't try to start the conversation unless you're feeling at ease and confident.

Think about when would be a good time for it.

An in-depth conversation takes time, so don't start it if either of you has to be somewhere in ten minutes' time. Sometimes it helps to ask when the person has time for a conversation.

"I'd like to have a quiet word with you. When would be a good time?"

Find a suitable place.

Go to a place where you won't be disturbed and you both feel at ease. Many people find it easier to talk about difficult things while walking, so a stroll may be a good opportunity.

"I feel in need of some fresh air. Will you come for a walk with me?"

The conversation

You might start it like this:

"I'm worried about you. You've been looking a bit down lately."

"I'm concerned that you don't come to our get-togethers any more. Are things not going well for you?"

"I hear your husband is ill. I imagine that must be a terrible strain. How are you coping?"

It's OK if it doesn't work.

The other person may well not respond to your invitation to talk. If this happens, don't take it personally. Maybe they're not in the mood, or perhaps they need time to pluck up courage. Try again later.

"OK, I understand. Would some other time suit you better?"

Listening is what matters most.

Many people are afraid of not being able to find the right words. But this underestimates the benefits of simply having somebody sympathetic to talk to. Your starting point for the conversation should be that you want to understand how the other person is feeling. Think up good questions rather than looking for answers.

“Can you tell me what makes you feel good at the moment?”

“How does it feel to be in this situation?”

“What would have to change for you to feel better?”

Show sympathy.

It feels good to be understood. You might express sympathy by saying:

“I can imagine how that’s getting you down.”

“I’m sorry you’re not doing well.”

Silences are not a problem.

Everybody sometimes has trouble finding words when talking about difficult situations. Don’t be in a hurry to end pauses and silences. To get the conversation going again, it sometimes helps to say:

“At the moment I don’t know what to say either.”

Know your own limitations.

If you form the impression that the other person needs more help than you can give, you might say:

“I feel at a loss.”

“Have you thought of talking to a specialist?”

Don’t offer to give more help unless you want to provide it.

Your attention and readiness to listen are a great help to the other person. If that’s as far as it goes, that’s OK too. If you feel like it, you can offer practical help – with housework or childcare, for example. Or you could just stick to listening:

“You can certainly talk to me about it if you like.”

Ending the conversation.

Sometimes the conversation can just all get too much. These words will help you to find a good way to end it.

“I don’t think we’re getting anywhere at the moment. Is it OK with you if we talk about something else?”

“I don’t know what to say. Shall we walk a little further together? We can talk about it another time.”

To be avoided

Don’t play the blame game.

Remarks like: “Why don’t you just pull yourself together?” or “You’re always such a pessimist” aren’t helpful. Mental illnesses are never a matter of willpower.

Don’t talk about your own problems.

Sometimes, with the best of intentions – to show understanding and sympathy –, we talk about our own problems. This makes the other person feel you’re not taking them seriously. But if you yourself have been through a very similar situation, then share your experience.

Don’t deliver any diagnoses.

Even if you suspect the other person is suffering from a specific illness, leave diagnosis to a specialist – otherwise the other person will feel that you’ve pinned a label on them.

Don’t play things down.

Don’t say: “It will be OK again soon” or “This will pass”. Remarks like this make sufferers feel that they’re not being taken seriously.

Don’t put the other person under pressure.

You should go into the conversation with the attitude that you only want to know what the other person wants to tell you. If the other person breaks off the conversation, don’t try to prolong it. You can try again another time.

After the conversation

If private matters came up in the conversation, keep them to yourself. If you need to talk to somebody else about them, don’t mention names. But if you feel that action is necessary – if the other person is having suicidal thoughts, for example – you should call Die Dargebotene Hand/La Main Tendue, **tel. 143** or seek the Advice + Help of Pro Juventute, **tel. 147**.

Advice for you or the person you’re worried about:

Addresses at www.how-are-you.ch

Other services:

First aid courses for mental health at www.ensa.swiss

Boost your own mental health too:

More at www.how-are-you.ch



**How
are
you?**

“I’m not doing very well.”

Talking helps.
Conversation tips

“I’m not doing very well.”

All of us are sometimes fearful, unfocused, angry, listless or sad – that’s normal. But if problems persist – like relationship stress, family disharmony, loneliness, pressure to perform at work or in education, or other worries – it can all get too much.

If you:

- have had persistent trouble sleeping at night because your worries go round and round in your head
- constantly get into arguments about nothing
- have been feeling lethargic and sad
- have been feeling that everything is too much for you
- have had no desire to leave the house
- have had difficulty in keeping up at school or in the workplace
- have had trouble concentrating

Then it’s time to take action.

Talking about problems, anxieties and negative feelings doesn’t make them go away – but it does make them less stressful, inspiring fresh hope or making it possible for you to get help. If you do nothing, your worries get more and more pressing – and that can make you seriously ill. So if you’re not doing OK, it’s important to talk about it. Many people are afraid of talking about personal problems. But the ability to talk about your weaknesses is a sign of strength. And also: people around you often sense that something isn’t right, but they lack the confidence to broach the subject with you. It helps if you make the first move.

Before the conversation

Pick somebody you trust.

It may be somebody you're close to, but it doesn't have to be. Sometimes it's easier to talk to someone you're not close to, perhaps a fellow member of a club or a neighbour.

Pick a suitable time.

An in-depth conversation takes time, so don't start it if either of you has to be somewhere in ten minutes' time. Sometimes it helps to ask when the person has time for a conversation.

"I'd like to have a quiet word with you. When would be a good time?"

Find a suitable place.

Where you won't be disturbed and you both feel at ease. Many people find it easier to talk about difficult subjects while walking, so a stroll may be a good opportunity.

"Shall we go for a stroll?"

The conversation

You might start it like this:

"Things haven't been going well for me lately."

"Things aren't that good for me. Can I talk to you about it?"

"I have a few problems at the moment. It would be nice to talk to someone about them."

It's OK if it doesn't work.

Ideally you will find the other person to be open and understanding: a good listener. But it's possible that your invitation to have a word won't be taken up. Even though this isn't easy, don't take it personally. The other person may simply be preoccupied with something else, or feel overburdened. Enquire when would be a good time, or ask somebody else.

"OK, I understand. Would some other time suit you better?"

Try to put across how you're feeling.

Other people can't read your mind or sense your feelings. The more you tell them about yourself, the easier it will be for them to understand what's wrong. Being understood has an alleviating effect.

Silences are not a problem.

We can't always find the right words when we talk about difficult situations. Don't be in a hurry to end pauses and silences. To get the conversation going again, it sometimes helps to say:

"At the moment I don't know what to say either."

Give feedback.

You can assume that the other person is unsure of whether they are conducting themselves correctly in the conversation. If you feel at ease, say so. That makes the conversation easier. You might say, for example:

"It's really nice to be able to talk to you."

Accept help.

Nobody can make your problems go away at the touch of a button. But little things can help a lot, like help with housework or childcare, seeing a movie or going jogging together. If you know what would help you, don't keep it to yourself.

"You don't need to solve my problems. But if you could look after the children for an hour or two now and again, that would help a lot."

Know your own limitations.

If you feel it's all getting too much for you, you can end the conversation at any time. You might say:

"I feel everything is getting too much for me at the moment. Let's talk again another time."

After the conversation

Talking to people around you is certainly important and stress-relieving, but it's not always enough.

If things haven't improved for you after a while, you should seek help from a specialist. The root cause of your situation may be an illness. The sooner you seek professional help, the quicker you'll be back to normal – because mental illnesses are treatable.

You can find the addresses of support services in your canton at www.how-are-you.ch

Or you can call one of these advisory services:

- Tel. 143: Die Dargebotene Hand/La Main Tendue – an advice line for adults (in German, French and Italian)
- Tel. 147: Pro Juventute – advice for children and young adults (in German)
- Tel. 0848 800 858: Pro Mente Sana – psychosocial and legal advice (in German)

Strengthen your mental health

We all take care of our physical health: brushing our teeth, watching our diet, arranging medical check-ups. You can strengthen and maintain your mental health too. We'll tell you how.



Stay in touch



Stay active



Relax



Let's talk



Ask for help



Get involved



Learn something new



Get creative



Accept yourself



Believe in yourself

For more information go to www.how-are-you.ch

Campaign partners:

On behalf of:

Gesundheitsförderung Schweiz
Promotion Santé Suisse
Promozione Salute Svizzera

