

Things to Say to Someone Experiencing a Mental Health Problem

It's common to feel unsure about how to talk about anxiety or depression, or to worry about saying the wrong thing. Here are some useful phrases people who have experienced anxiety or depression say are most helpful to hear during difficult times. These are statements in a conversation which help someone to feel listened to, understood, and hopeful that things can improve.

I'm here for you.
Anxiety and depression can make people feel very isolated and alone. Hearing someone say explicitly that they'll be there, and will stick by you during recovery, can really help. Of course, it's most important that you follow through on that promise.
I can see this is a really hard time for you.
Validating that the experience of anxiety and depression is difficult is one of the most helpful things you can say. The least helpful statements are those that shut down the conversation ("I know how you feel", "just snap out of it", "you're attention seeking", "think more positively", "you'll be right", "just get over it").
I'm not sure what to do, but I'm sure we can figure it out together.
You don't have to always have the answers – and it's best not to pretend you do. What's important is that you're willing to stick around and help them figure out how to start feeling better.
What can I do to help? Just tell me how.
Ask them to be honest about how you can help them. The support they need will change throughout their recovery so be prepared to be flexible. Taking initiative and doing small things to show you care can also help.
I know it doesn't feel like it now but there is hope that things can get better.
Encourage hope. Remind them that anxiety and depression are treatable, and with the right support, most people recover.
Have you thought about seeing your doctor or calling EFAP? There is support available.
Highlight the importance of seeking professional support. Friends and family can offer a great deal of support but professionals have a crucial role in treating anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems and promoting recovery.

This conversation is between you and me.

It's important you are able to be trusted. Respect their privacy by not sharing what they tell you with anyone unless they say you can (unless they are at risk of hurting themselves).

I'm sorry if I said the wrong thing. Can we start again?

Don't beat yourself up if you say the wrong thing, or offence is taken to something you say. You're both trying to talk through a difficult experience. Focus on what's more important in the conversation.

I have noticed you seem to be doing better lately. Is that how it feels for you?

Noticing the positive changes can be hard to spot, particularly if they are small and gradual. But gently pointing out your observations can help them to feel like things might just be improving.

Do you feel like doing something together to help take your mind off things?

It's best not to talk about how they're feeling all the time. Doing an activity you both enjoy can help people with anxiety and depression change the focus of their negative thinking and offer a sense of hope for the future.