



Basics for Supporting Friends

Friends can be a great place to go for support. Because you may be going through similar things, you may be able to help each other in a way that adults can't. Here are some tools and resources you can use to make sure your friend gets the support they need and your needs are met as well.



A.S.K: Acknowledge, Support, Keep in Touch

The A.S.K. tool, created by Active Minds, is helpful to use when providing support. Whether you are supporting a friend in person or online, remember to A.S.K.:

- **Acknowledge** that what your friend is going through must be hard. Let them know that you are there to listen and that their feelings are valid.
- **Support** your friend by listening before responding. Repeat back what they've shared to check that you understand. Let your friend take the lead in telling you what they need. Ask open-ended questions to learn more about how you can help.
- **Keep in touch** by making a plan for reconnecting. This might be in-person, over text, or in a DM. Add a reminder to your calendar to check in with them when you planned to.

It is important to remember to take care of your own mental health while being supportive of your friend. You can create healthy boundaries for yourself by figuring out what you have the energy for and what you do not. You can find ways to support your friend that meet both of your needs, especially when you both may be juggling many responsibilities.

Do's and Don'ts

- **Don't:** Feel like you need to speak formally with your friend or follow a script. Saying something like, "I do not have the capacity to perform emotional labor at the moment" may feel forced or unnatural.
- **Do:** Use words that feel comfortable and accessible to you both. One example of this might be texting someone: "tbh, I don't think I can give you my best rn. Could we talk after school?"
- **Don't:** Interrogate or pester your friend with a lot of questions about their situation.
- **Do:** Make space for them to share what they are comfortable sharing. For example, you could say something like, "You don't have to share anything you don't want to, but I care and am here to listen if you do want to share."
- **Don't:** Overpower the conversation by relating everything back to your own similar experiences. For example, avoid saying things like, "I totally understand. I experienced something similar and this is how I got through it."
- **Do:** Let them know that you recognize and respect their experiences. You could say something like, "I can't know exactly what you're going through, but I recognize how hard it must be. It never feels good to be treated like that."

Providing In-Person Support

Supporting a friend face-to-face may feel tough, especially if you have never done it before. But there are some ways to make it easier:

- **Find a comfortable place** to check in with friends or offer your support. Privacy and noise level are important. Places where other people may overhear what your friend is saying could make them less likely to open up. You also don't want to choose somewhere that is so loud you have trouble hearing each other. You could try asking if they want to go to a park or grab a bite to eat after school.
- **Body language** is an important part of offering support to a friend in person. If you are listening to your friend with your arms crossed, they may feel like you are judging them. If you are paying attention to something on your phone, they may think you are bored by what they have to say. However, sitting with your arms uncrossed while nodding as they talk shows that you are listening and open to hearing them. It is important to remember that there is no "right" way to position yourself as long as it feels natural to you and shows that you care.
- **Tone** is another thing that comes into play when providing in-person support. The tone of someone's voice can give you a clue about how they may be feeling. You may notice that they sound more frustrated or sad than usual. You can also do your best to keep your tone non-judgmental and caring while you provide support.
- **School clubs** focused on mental health can be a good place to support yourself and others. If you are able to, recommend that the club do a "check-in" at the beginning of every meeting where everyone can share how they are feeling on a scale from 1-5. This way, you can see how your friends are feeling and can follow up with them afterward. You can say something like: "Hey, I noticed you said you were a "2" today during check-in. I'm here if you want to talk."



Providing Support Online

Offering support online can feel less stressful and slow down the conversation. However, it may also make it difficult to know what a person's tone or body language is like. Here are some tools to help you provide support online:

- **Texting or DMs** can be a great way to offer support to your friend. You can ask them how they are feeling, but in a way that might feel less awkward. Here is one example of how you can do this:
 - You: "Hey, you seemed down today. Just wanted you to know I'm here for you if you need anything."
 - Friend: "Yeah, there's something I need to get off my chest. Can we go for a walk tomorrow?"
 - You: "I'm really glad you're telling me. Unfortunately, I'm busy tomorrow :(but I'd love to go for a walk on Wednesday!"
 - Friend: "Great - thanks. I've been having a hard time with motivation lately, so it's helpful to have a plan."
 - You: "Ofc - looking forward to it! Feel free to text me if you just want someone to chat with in the meantime."
- **Use emojis, gifs, and memes** to respond to something they have shared or as a way to ask how they are doing. This can break the ice when trying to start a hard conversation. Emojis, gifs, and memes can help to communicate tone, which can be difficult to understand over text/DM. They can also be helpful if people feel more comfortable expressing themselves in pictures rather than words. However, make sure it isn't something that would poke fun at how they are feeling or make them feel like their emotions aren't valid.
- **Playing online games** together can be another way to start a conversation. If you and a friend typically play a particular online game, you can type or talk as you play. You can ask something as simple as, "What's up?" or "Are you OK? You don't seem like yourself lately." If this feels like a hard topic for them to discuss, playing the game while chatting may give them something to do so they feel less nervous.
- **Voice notes** or audio messages give you and the other person time to think. It's like talking on the phone, but both people have as much time as they need to listen to what the other person is saying and respond. This can make it easier to have a conversation because you can still hear the other person's tone of voice, but can talk at a much slower pace than a regular phone call.



If you or a friend are struggling with your mental health, visit mhascreening.org to take an anonymous, free, and private mental health test.

It only takes a few minutes, and after you are finished you will be given information about the next steps you can take based on the results.

What Else Can I Do To Help?

Here are some examples of how you can offer your support day to day:

- **Planning to do an activity you both enjoy together**, like playing video games, crafting, sports, hobbies, etc.
- **Doing homework together** to reduce stress at school.
- **Helping with household chores/babysitting** (if it is safe to do so).
- **Creating a routine** with your friend like going for a short walk everyday, texting them after school, or eating lunch in the same place. This routine can help your friend feel calm and safe. It also lets them know you are there for them on a regular basis.
- **Building mental health check-ins into your day-to-day conversation**, like you would check-in with them about how their family is doing or how clubs are going.



What If My Friend Needs More Than I Can Give?

If your friend comes to you with a situation that feels too big for you to handle, such as bullying, self-harm, abuse, etc., you might not know what to say. It can be hard to find the right words to tell them that you care about them, but that you are not the best person to help them. Here are some tips that can help:

- **Determine and share your boundaries:** When a friend comes to you with something hard, you may feel like you want to do whatever you can to help them, no matter what it takes. But it is good to remember that you are not the only person that can help. Identifying and sharing what you are able to do and what you are not able to do will help you both know what to expect. It can also help you to make sure your needs are met while supporting your friend. For example, your friend may want to talk on the phone about what they are going through late into the night. You can share with your friend that you are happy to talk on the phone with them, but will need to get going by 9 pm so you can get some rest. Talk about when you will connect with them next so they know you are there for them.
- **Have a discussion about who else might be able to help:** The challenge your friend is going through may require support from an adult. That trusted adult can make sure your friend is safe, protected, and gets the help they need. You can talk with your friend about who they feel comfortable going to. You can also talk through what might happen if your friend talks to this person so they are not surprised if further actions are taken afterward. Offer to go with your friend to talk to this adult if it would help them feel less nervous.
- **Provide them with resources:** You may not be an expert on the problem your friend is trying to solve, but you can share resources with them from people who are experts. For example, you could say something like: "I'm not sure I'm the right person to help you with this. But I can give you info about who CAN help." This lets them know that you care and provides them with tools they need to move forward. See the following page for a list of resources.
- **Take care of yourself:** Sometimes when a friend shares hard information with you, you may feel sad or worried. It can be a lot to deal with, especially if your friend has asked you to keep their situation private. To process your feelings, you could try writing in a journal or calling an anonymous hotline. You can also set aside time to do some activities to help you unwind.



Resources for More Support



If your friend is having thoughts of suicide, they can reach out to:

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call: 988 (Spanish and English help available)

TTY users: 800-799-4889

Website: 988lifeline.org/chat

Crisis Text Line

Text: HELLO to 741741 for English or AYUDA to 741741 for Spanish.

Website: crisistextline.org

YouthLine (teen crisis support)

Call: 877-968-8491

Text: teen2teen to 839863

Hours: Teens are available from 4-10 pm Pacific. Adults are available 24/7.

Website: theyouthline.org

If your friend is part of the LGBTQ+ community and is in crisis, they can reach out to:

The Trevor Project

Call: 866-488-7386

Text: START to 678-678

Website: thetrevorproject.org/get-help

Trans Lifeline

Call: 877-565-8860

Hours: 10 am-6 pm Pacific

11 am-7 pm Mountain

12 pm-8 pm Central

1 pm-9 pm Eastern

Website: translifeline.org

If your friend is a BIPOC individual in crisis, they can reach out to:

Call Blackline (crisis intervention and reporting harmful interactions with police)

Call: 800-604-5841

Website: callblackline.com

If your friend tells you they are being abused or have witnessed abuse, they can reach out to:

Childhelp (child abuse hotline)

Call or Text: 800-422-4453

Website: childhelphotline.org

Love is Respect National Dating Abuse Helpline

Call: 866-331-9474

Text: LOVEIS to 22522

Website: loveisrespect.org

The National Domestic Violence Hotline

Call: 800-799-7233

Text: START to 88788

Website: thehotline.org

The National Sexual Assault Hotline

Call: 800-656-4673

Website: rainn.org/about-national-sexual-assault-telephone-hotline

If your friend has run away or is thinking of running away, they can reach out to:

The National Runaway Safeline

Call or Text: 1-800-786-2929

Website: 1800runaway.org