

STARTING A CONVERSATION WITH SOMEONE ABOUT THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

MENTAL HEALTH *is* **EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY & A COMMUNITY EFFORT**

WHEN PEOPLE EXPERIENCE DISTRESS

they typically want to talk to someone they know, someone who can show them an expression of genuine interest, caring, and concern. Whether you are a professor, coach, tutor, classmate, or a friend, the person addressing you has likely chosen to speak to you for a reason. ●

BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT THE CONVERSATION.

Find time, preferably in a private place. Start by telling them that you have noticed that they don't seem their usual self and describe the changes you've noticed in their mood or behavior. Tell them you are worried about them and ask about what is bothering them. Some phrases that might help you get started: *"You don't seem yourself lately, what's going on?"* or *"Tell me about what is going on?"* or *"I've noticed you haven't been going out lately, is there anything you'd like to talk about?"* ●

LISTEN CAREFULLY TO WHAT THEY ARE SAYING. Try not to interrupt while they are talking and leave any comments or questions you may have until they have finished. Some phrases that may be useful in encouraging them to talk about how they are really feeling while showing you care: *"Take your time, there is no rush. I know it can be difficult to talk about this"* or *"I can hear that you have been going through a really tough time. Please tell me more about it so I can understand"*. ●



SOME OF THE THINGS THAT STUDENTS TELL YOU MAY BE WORRYING OR OVERWHELMING TO HEAR.

Try to stay calm and not over react to what they are saying as this could cause more stress and worry for them. Use positive body language to express that you truly empathize and can understand what they are telling you. Comments such as *"what happened next"* or simply stating *"I understand"* can reinforce that you are actively listening and paying attention to what they are saying. Paraphrasing what they have said back to them can also help to reinforce your interest and understanding. Note that walking a student over to the Counseling Center right away or bringing up counseling services too soon will likely communicate to the student that what they are coming to you with is too much and may make them feel ashamed. Typically, students who are brought to **CSDC** in this fashion do not return and will not be following up with you, actively isolating them from support. ●



SIMPLY LISTENING AND PROVIDING A LITTLE SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE,

often helps most students in distress. However, others may require much more than you may be able to provide. Pay attention to signs that you are over-extending yourself: feeling stressed out or overwhelmed by the situation, feeling angry at or afraid of the student, feeling responsible for their safety and well-being, and having thoughts of “adopting” or otherwise rescuing the student. Once you have taken the time, made yourself available, and have had a few conversations, you may want to gently bring up other support resources. ●

RECOMMEND THAT THE STUDENT CONSIDERS OTHER RESOURCES ON CAMPUS

like Chaplains, Counseling Center, Academic Deans, Student Health, or the Dean of Students to name a few for additional support. Let the student know that Counseling Center services are free, voluntary, and confidential. Tell them that the Counseling Center has phone consultations hours Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 1pm to 4pm that can be scheduled online. If the student is ready to commit to a video or in-person appointment they can schedule those online with no pressure of calling the office. Direct students to CSDC website at bucknell.edu/counseling ●



WHAT IF THEY DON'T WANT TO TALK? Some people are not ready, do not know how or may not want to speak to someone about how they are feeling. While this is very worrying for people close to them it doesn't help to pressure them to talk if they are not ready, it's up to them whether they want to talk or not. Focus on spending time with them so that they don't feel alone. It can take time for someone to feel comfortable enough to talk about how they are feeling. Let them know that you are concerned about them and are there if they want to talk. Reassure them with phrases such as “*call me if you ever want to talk*” or “*I am here for you if you decide you want to talk*”. Ask them if there are any specific reasons for why they don't want to seek help. Once you have an idea on what is worrying them, you may be able to work together to find a solution. Suggest, when they are ready, that they can speak to someone else they trust if they want to, a counselor, chaplain or medical provider or contact a support line if they would feel more comfortable speaking to someone they don't know. ●

REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THE STUDENT HAS CONNECTED WITH ANOTHER RESOURCE ON CAMPUS,

follow up with them. Reassure them they are not alone, and there is hope that things can get better. Be patient and understanding. It is important to remember that setbacks will occur. Help them overcome any setbacks and ask questions such as “*What can I do to support you with this?*” Checking in with them frequently to see how they are going. This shows that you care about them and provides an opportunity to talk. ●



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