



How to Help a Friend Who is Struggling

When a close friend is going through a difficult time, it can feel worrying and confusing. You want to support them, but may be unsure how to best be there for them. Here are some tips for supporting a friend who is struggling with their mental health.

Listen Without Judgment:

If a friend shares what they're going through with you, the first step is to listen without judging. Thank them for having the courage to confide in you. Use validating statements like "I'm proud of you for opening up about this". "I'm here for you," and "This doesn't change how much I care about you."

Making them feel heard, accepted, and cared for is so important. Don't downplay their feelings. Don't give unsolicited advice, or share their private details without permission. Your role is to listen compassionately and let them know you support them.



Check In Regularly:

Keep checking in after your initial conversation. Text them simple messages like "Hope you're doing okay today! Let me know if you need anything." Invite them to hang out one-on-one to continue talking if they need support. Don't stop reaching out even if they seem distant at first. Persistent care can make a real difference.

Suggest Speaking to a Trusted Adult:

Being a listening ear is important. But you cannot offer professional mental health support. Gently encourage your friend to open up to an adult they trust. Whether it's a parent, relative, teacher, coach, or school counselor.

You could say, "I want to help, but I think this is bigger than me. Do you feel comfortable talking to your mom about this?" Offer to go with them when they have the conversation or help them write down main points they want to cover. Getting adult care is crucial.

Don't Keep Harmful Secrets:

If your friend confides that they are struggling with self-harm, an eating disorder, substance abuse, or suicidal thoughts, you must tell a trusted adult like your parent or school counselor. Your loyalty is to your friend's life and safety above all else. They may be upset at first, but you are doing the right thing by getting them help. These issues need professional support.

Encourage Other Healthy Coping Skills:

In addition to professional care, gently encourage positive coping habits. These could include:

- Journaling
- Exercising
- Spending time outdoors

- Engaging in creative hobbies
- Practicing relaxation techniques
- Eating well
- Getting enough sleep

Developing healthy outlets can help improve mood and build resilience during difficult times.

Set Boundaries if Needed:

Helping a friend should not come at the expense of your own health. It's okay to set boundaries around how much you can help. Reach out to other friends, family, or a counselor if you feel overwhelmed. You matter too - take care of yourself so you can be fully present for your friend without burning out.

Don't Lose Hope:

Remind your friend that what they're going through now isn't permanent. With time and treatment, they can feel better again. Share stories of others who have overcome similar challenges. Your unwavering faith in their ability to heal can go a long way in keeping their spirits up when times are dark. Brighter days are ahead.

Being a caring, non-judgmental listener and guiding your friend to get professional support are the best things you can do when they are struggling mentally. While challenging, you've got this! Your compassion and encouragement can truly help your friend get through this difficult time.