



Supporting & Promoting Emotional Well-Being in Conversation



**Student
Well-Being**

MCDONALD CENTER



What do I say?

We've all encountered moments in conversations when another person opens up to us. Recognizing moments as the opportunities they are - to connect to and support another human - can be easier than knowing what to say next.

This guide is designed to provide you with a few tips as you navigate formative moments in your own life and in the lives of those around you.

Always know that being fully present and listening in a caring and non-judgmental way is much more powerful than your words.

ask, hear, validate

ask

It can be challenging to open up. A simple but genuine opening question, "How are you doing?" and giving another person space to genuinely answer can be a great starting point.

How are you really doing?

How have things been for you?

Are you okay?

hear

Listening to someone is one of the most important things you can do when someone trusts you with vulnerability. And while simply listening is a great place to start, really hearing the person - understanding, empathizing, and connecting the pieces of their story - can help someone feel seen and understood.

What I'm hearing you say is...

It sounds like ___ is really important to you.

validate

When someone shares a difficult feeling or experience with you, validating what they share allows them to feel seen and heard. Even if their experiences or feelings are different from your own, recognizing there is a wide range of "normal" is very supportive.

**That's hard!
It's normal to feel scared or anxious during this time period.**

avoid fixes, advice, "should"

avoid fixes

Listening to another person's hardships can elicit a natural response within us to fix the "problem." Many times, however, there are no easy solutions, and offering them can feel dismissive.

Instead of:

"I know what you need."

Try:

"How can I best support you?"

avoid advice

What worked for you might not work for another. Unless explicitly asking for advice, most people are looking to talk about their options as a way to find their own best solution.

Instead of:

"Here's what I did when I faced this..."

Try:

"What do you think might work for you?"

avoid "should"

While often coming from a place of support, a "should" is really telling someone what to do, think, or feel. This can invalidate and create more distance than connection.

Instead of:

"You should do/think/feel _____."

Try:

"What are you thinking/feeling?"

notice, monitor, reflect

notice

When listening to others, especially if the conversation is emotionally charged or vulnerable, we often have our own internal thoughts. If we are unaware, it can impact our ability to respond in helpful and supportive ways. Noticing our own internal thoughts and reactions is the first step in navigating them.

Things to Notice:

- Body Language
- Internal Thoughts
- Focus/Attention
- Emotions

monitor

As we notice internal thoughts we can monitor them. There may be a moment when we need to take a break from the conversation. If our reactions are especially overwhelming, it might be useful to pause the conversation or kindly connect the person with another resource.

"What you have to say is important, and I want to give you my full attention, but am struggling to right now. Can we find a better time or can I connect you with someone else?"

reflect

During and after a vulnerable conversation, reflect on anything that came up for you. If you experienced discomfort, explore why. If you felt you were at a loss for words, reflect on times you have felt supported and validated and practice that language. Perhaps ask others what has helped them in challenging times.

Why did I have that reaction to this topic? How can I be supportive in a similar situation in the future?

refer, support, check in

refer

Difficult emotions are normal responses to the challenges of life. However, when someone is having difficulty functioning or there are concerns they might hurt themselves or others, knowing how to refer them to another resource is important. Click the links below.

[University
Counseling
Center](#)

[Care and
Wellness
Consultants](#)

[TimelyCare](#)

support

If you offer a referral, recognize the individual may choose not to follow up. Offer validation of either choice, and any support in helping to make the connection that would help.

"Would you like to walk over to the UCC? I'd go with if you'd like."

"It can be hard to ask for help. If you're not ready, that's okay."

check in

Check in with the person who shared their struggle with you. It can feel isolating to share vulnerability and then never have it acknowledged again. Respect their desire to discuss or not to discuss ongoing struggles.

"Just wanted to see how you're doing – no obligation to respond, but I'm here if you'd like to talk more or explore other options."



Interested in exploring more?

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