

What are mental health conditions?

Mental health conditions are conditions that interfere with a person's well-being, happiness, self-esteem, involvement in daily life and hope and plans for their future. Our minds are powerful. Problems that affect our minds and feelings also affect our bodies.

What is the difference?

Depression is a condition when a person feels hopeless and helpless. It can cause serious appetite and sleep problems, lack of energy, interest and ability to enjoy things or other people.

Anxiety is a feeling of worry or fear that something will go wrong, feelings of jumpiness, fast heart and breathing, headache, sleep problems, dry mouth, stomach cramps, loss of energy.

Trauma is an experience of a threat to life/health/safety against which a person is feeling helpless. After trauma, the following may be experienced: negative thoughts and feelings, flashbacks (memories as if the experience is happening now), nightmares, difficulty sleeping, always on guard, withdrawal from others, irritability, aggression, risky behaviours, poor concentration.

Mental Health

How to talk to someone with mental health challenges

- ▶ Let them know that you know their problems and that their **feelings are real and legitimate**.
- ▶ **Don't assume you know** how they are feeling or what they are thinking.
- ▶ Encourage them to **talk honestly**: ask them what thoughts are going through their mind, or what their thoughts are.
- ▶ Ask questions so that you **have a picture** of what things are like for them.
- ▶ Help them **break down their problems** into smaller steps that can be addressed.
- ▶ Help them identify things they can do that **help them feel better**, even briefly.
- ▶ Encourage them to **exercise regularly**, eat well and get enough sleep.
- ▶ Ask them about **people who are supportive** of them and who they might be able to talk to.

Remember

- ▶ Depression, anxiety, responses to trauma and other mental health conditions are our brain's and body's response to our experiences. Physical and psychological changes are as real as our body's response to infection and other medical illness.
- ▶ You can't talk someone out of a mental health condition. Trying to do so will only make them feel misunderstood and more alone.
- ▶ Thoughts and feelings are usually expressed through behaviour. If someone is engaging in risky or problematic behaviour, it means there are problems that need to be understood.
 - This does not mean negative behaviours are OK or should be supported.
 - Behaviours that affect a person's wellbeing and/or relationships should be addressed, but along with trying to understand the problems that are causing them.

What should you know about people who are abusing substances?

- ▶ Remember, people often use substances to help them cope with difficult feelings and experiences.
- ▶ Encouraging them to stop using substances if the underlying problems aren't addressed will do no good.
- ▶ Talk with them about how they feel when they are not under the influence of substances.
- ▶ Help them talk about and get support for the underlying problems.

