

# THE DO'S AND DON'TS

## OF TALKING TO A FRIEND ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AND SUBSTANCE MISUSE OR ABUSE

It can be difficult for anyone to open up about a **mental health issue** or **substance abuse issue** they may be experiencing. When they do, there are some “do’s” and “don’ts” to help you have a positive conversation.

### Do's

1

**Be a good listener.** Remember the conversation is not about what you know, but how your friend feels and what they are experiencing. Let them share.

2

**Offer words of encouragement and support.**

Your friend is likely feeling vulnerable, alone or scared. Make sure they know they can depend on you.

3

**Be accepting, understanding and compassionate.**

The decision to open up and talk about their issues was likely not an easy one.

4

**Be patient.** It's not easy for someone to admit a problem and the conversation can take time.

5

**Encourage your friend to seek professional help.**

It is easy for someone to feel like they can manage the situation on their own, especially when there is a stigma associated with mental health and substance use issues.

### Don'ts

1

**Don't tell them to “snap out of it” or “cheer up.”** Comments like these can make someone feel criticized and humiliated for feeling the way they do. Their condition is serious and likely cannot be brushed off. Try your best to make them feel comfortable and secure in sharing their emotions.

2

**Don't tell them that they can use willpower to get through it.**

Remember, your friend likely does not want to feel the way they are feeling. If they could will their way out of the condition, then they would. Mental health and substance use issues are associated with chemical changes in the brain and can be difficult to overcome. There is no replacement for professional help or effective treatment.

3

**Don't give them an ultimatum or tell them you won't be their friend if they don't seek help.** This could push them further away and make them angry.

4

**Don't make it a one-time conversation.** It can take multiple conversations to help someone see that they need to seek treatment or professional help with a mental health or substance use issue.

