

ROADMAP TO FRIENDS

SUPPORTING FRIENDS



Asking for support can be a real challenge. And offering support can be just as difficult. Both can feel uncomfortable, daunting, or just plain awkward. Here, we outline ideas to make the process easier. Whether you or a friend is dealing with something difficult, support is one of the most important ways to cope. Read on to learn more.

WHAT SUPPORT LOOKS LIKE

Support is:

anything that makes you feel more grounded and connected during a difficult experience. Support helps you get through challenges and improve your ability to manage future ones.

Support leads to greater mental wellness by:

Building connection, which is an antidote to stress

Creating increased vulnerability with someone else, which strengthens a bond

Fostering the feeling that you're not alone

Providing a space to gain perspective on the difficulty you're experiencing

Note that we are focusing on what support for daily mental wellness looks like rather than how to provide clinical mental health services. If you or a loved one needs professional assistance, you can find a licensed mental health clinician by searching for local mental health organizations, the mental health department of hospitals, or online therapist directories.

Types of Support

These are some examples of what support can look like, whether you are asking for support or providing it to a friend. There are many forms of support, and three of the most common are: **processing** (addressing your emotions without judging them), **constructive distraction** (taking your mind off the issue while engaging in a healthy activity), and **problem solving** (focused effort to find a solution). Consider what's most needed in the moment and focus on that first.

Type of Support	How to Request it	How to Offer it
Processing	Call or ask a friend to meet up to tell them whatever is on your mind	Call or offer to meet up with your friend so that they can tell you whatever is on their mind
Constructive Distraction	Ask a friend to join you in an activity that fosters your mental wellness	Reach out to ask your friend if they would like to do an activity with you that you know they enjoy
Problem Solving	Ask a friend for to assist in solving a problem or a specific task	Ask your friend if they would like problem solving, or if that wouldn't be helpful right now
Processing + Problem Solving	Take steps to begin individual or group psychotherapy with a mental health clinician	Ask your friend if they want help researching or reaching out to a therapist

If you would like formal training on supporting individuals with clinical mental health conditions or handling mental health crises, here are some resources to consider:

[Crisis Text Line Crisis Counselor Training](#)

[Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Training](#)

[Mental Health First Aid Training](#)

[NAMI Basics Program](#)

[NAMI Family-to-Family Training](#)

[NAMI Family and Friends Seminar](#)

[Trans Lifeline Volunteer Hotline Training](#)

[The Trevor Project Crisis Counselor Training](#)

Asking a Friend for Support

Getting around roadblocks to asking for support: There are many reasons why it's difficult to ask for support. Some roadblocks and ways to sidestep them include:

ROADBLOCK

HOW TO SIDESTEP IT

Shame: feeling like there is something “wrong” with you if you ask for support, or that it makes you weak.

Reframe how you imagine asking for support. Consider that everyone needs help. Also, doing something difficult takes strength. Asking for help is difficult! Therefore, asking for help is a sign of strength.

Stigma: in many cultures and communities, there is a real stigma around asking for support from others. Going against this can feel shameful or like you're breaking a taboo.

Try to find someone within your community who values asking for support, maybe someone who has leaned on you in the past. If this is difficult, look beyond your immediate community for someone who you feel comfortable with.

Guilt: sometimes it feels like asking for support will burden others.

Consider that others often feel useful by providing support. It is also a way of getting closer to others.

Not having the words: sometimes asking for support is such a new task that it's difficult to come up with a way to ask for it.

Let the other person in on this – tell them that you're not sure how this works but that you'd like to give it a try. Taking this first step of vulnerability will put you more at ease.

Where to begin when you are in need of support

Looking for support can feel overwhelming, so let's break it down into specific ideas for starting out. When you are in need of support, a good place to begin is to:

Decide who you want to reach out to and in what context

Given your situation, would a friend, family member, colleague, or acquaintance be the best person to lean on? Consider who you feel the safest with and reach out to them first. Ask them to talk in an environment that feels comfortable for you.

Determine what form of support you most need

Would distraction, processing, problem solving, or a combination of these be the most helpful right now?

Embrace the discomfort. Ask yourself why seeking support feels difficult, and consider how you can work through that discomfort. Some of these might be reflected in the roadblocks listed here.

Offering Support to Friends

Getting around roadblocks to offering support: Although there are many reasons why it's hard to offer support, there are clear ways to get around those difficulties. Here are some ideas:

ROADBLOCK

Discomfort: offering support is not something we're typically trained in, so of course it feels uncomfortable.

Stigma: in many cultures and communities, there's a view that you're not supposed to need help from others. You might feel like you're breaking a taboo or not want to make your friend feel like they are breaking one.

Fear: you might not want to make your friend feel uncomfortable, or you might be avoiding your own discomfort.

Not having the words: sometimes offering support is a completely new task, and it can be difficult to find the words.

HOW TO SIDESTEP IT

Consider how you'll feel after the conversation. At that point, your discomfort will likely have disappeared and you'll feel better because you supported a friend.

Reflect on when and why some cultural taboos were created, and why they might not be serving you in this moment. Stepping outside tradition does not mean you are turning your back on your culture, and sometimes allows us to embrace the parts of our culture we love more fully and honestly.

Consider that you actually might make your friend feel more comfortable if you are upfront about wanting to support them. Oftentimes, our friends want us to make the first move, even if they don't say it!

See suggestions on the next page for getting the supportive conversation started. Try validating their emotions, thanking them, and asking what would be helpful. Also check out the [Mental Health Coalition's Language Guide](#).

More info: [Active Mindsa](#), [Active Mindsb](#), [AFSPa](#), [ASFPb](#), [CMI](#), [Crisis Text Line](#), [MHA](#), [Seize the Awkward](#)

Where to begin when offering support

Start whenever. If you're worried that you've never offered support to this friend before, it's never too late to start. You can break the ice by saying, "Hey, I know we haven't talked about these things before, but I wanted to check in with you..."

Make yourself vulnerable. This way you're setting the tone for vulnerability so that your friend might also feel more comfortable. Start by saying something like, "I've struggled in the past, and it was really helpful to talk to a friend. I'm here for you if you need that."

Embrace the discomfort. Ask yourself why offering support feels difficult, and consider how you can work through that discomfort. Some of these might be reflected in the roadblocks listed here. Also remind yourself that the discomfort will be worth it to support your friend.

Be a connector. If you notice your friend doesn't seem comfortable, ask if there's anyone else who they would feel comfortable talking to and if you can help connect them.

Use a conversation starter inspired by [Seize the Awkward](#) (see following page) →

“Hey, you seemed down today. I’m here for you if you want to chat.”

“Life can be pretty overwhelming. If you need to talk, know that I’m here.”

“You know you can tell me anything. I won’t judge and am happy to listen.”

“I wonder if you could use a good talk. I’m here for that.”

“Have you been doing alright? I noticed you haven’t been around much.”

“It seems like something might be up. You wanna talk about what’s going on?”

“You’re my friend and it’s important to me to know how you’re feeling.”

“Whenever you’re ready to talk, I’m ready to listen.”

REMEMBER THAT ASKING FOR AND OFFERING SUPPORT GETS EASIER THE MORE YOU PRACTICE IT.

This Roadmap was created by Naomi Torres-Mackie, Ph.D.; Sophia Uppal, M.Ed.; and Anna Marie Fennell, M.Ed., MHC-LP, for The Mental Health Coalition. Special thanks to Visible for funding this important work.



Dealing with the discomfort is the key to **friends supporting friends**.

If you would like **more information on mental health, mental wellness, and/or offering support**, see the Mental Health Coalition's [Resource Library](#).

For a specific guide on language around mental health, check out [the Mental Health Coalition's Language Guide](#).

And see the Mental Health Coalition's [121 Series](#) to watch inspiring conversations around the importance of finding your "one" to go to for support.