



Child, Youth & Families
Addiction and
Mental Health

A Friend is Having Some Mental Health Troubles; *How can I be Supportive?*

1. Be informed about what your friend is dealing with

Depending on how strong your friendship is, it can be beneficial to know exactly what illness or disorder your friend has been diagnosed with, or is suspected of having. It is also useful to have a general idea of the medication they are taking. While your friend may or may not want this information shared publicly, and their privacy needs to be respected, in the event of a crisis scenario knowing this information can allow you to share valuable details with medical professionals. Make sure you don't force your friend to tell you this information if they don't want to, everyone has a different level of comfort talking about their mental health experiences.



2. Understand that being social might be difficult for them

There is a large chance your friend is struggling to get a good sleep each night, or adjusting to medication that makes them feel funny, confused, or a bit disoriented. If your friend doesn't want to hang out as much, or they seem more quiet than usual, understand that it's likely not personal, and that they aren't mad at you. When you are able to spend time together try doing activities that they enjoy, this can make it easier for them to stay engaged.

3. Establish clear boundaries

A combination of medication, stress, and lack of sleep may make you friend act in ways that are uncharacteristic to them. This could mean their patience or temper is shorter than usual. While it's important to treat them with compassion it is equally important to keep them grounded and ensure they continue to treat you with respect. Your friend should not be making you feel guilty or bad, even if they're doing it unintentionally. If you're trying your best you shouldn't feel pressured to do more than that. Remember to be kind to yourself while dealing with something so heavy, you need to take care of yourself too.





4. Be careful about what you read online

You may be interested in researching a friend's illness to better understand what they are going through. While there is a vast amount of useful information on mental illness that can be found online, it is also easy to stumble upon anecdotes from others who paint a less than positive picture. Be cautious when reading these stories, as they may paint an unnecessarily dark picture about your friend's disorder. As with anything we read online, be aware of who's perspective it's coming from.

5. You shouldn't feel like their therapist

While it can be good to allow your friend to open up about their difficulties and complex issues doing so on a frequent basis may result in stress and feelings of being overwhelmed. It is perfectly okay to allow them to talk candidly about their mental health journey, especially if they are feeling particularly down, but be careful that this does not define your entire friendship. You also should not feel like you have to "fix" their problems – usually simply listening with patience and kindness is more useful than giving advice.



6. Know when to detach completely

There is a chance, albeit small, that your friend's issues are too extreme for you to handle. This could lead you down a path that makes you feel uncomfortable, puts your own safety at risk, or becomes a prolonged mental health journey. If your friend is getting in trouble with the law, experimenting with various drugs, physically or emotionally harming people, indulging in risky sexual behavior, or struggling to maintain good social standing with your fellow peers, it's okay to distance yourself from them or stop seeing them completely. Try to communicate with them why you need some space, if that feels safe.

211 Alberta

Connecting people to the right services for their situation. *I contact 211 when I need more info or don't know who to contact.*

Website: ab.211.ca

Phone: 211

Kids Help Phone

A 24/7 national support service offering information, referrals, and professional counselling. *I contact Kids Help Phone when I need to talk to someone.*

Website: kidshelpphone.ca

Phone: 1-800-668-6868

Text "TALK" to 686868

Resources

Mental Health Helpline

All ages 24/7 confidential service offering crisis intervention, information, and referral. *I call here for information on mental health services, or for advice in a crisis situation.*

Phone: 1-877-303-2642

Crisis Service Mental Health Response Team

Providing immediate crisis support to children and adolescents. *I call here when there is an emergency/ crisis.*

Phone: 780-427-4491

Always There App (free)

This anonymous and confidential app connects you to mental health professionals via instant chat available Wed – Sun evenings.

BeSafe App (free)

This app is for those thinking of suicide and/or their supports. It connects to resources, provides crisis interventions, and shows how to make a safety plan.

There are lots of other apps that aim to encourage positive mental health – find the one that work for you!