

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

Talking About Domestic Violence & Healthy Relationships

Many people experiencing abuse never tell anyone what they're going through. A caring conversation can help someone feel seen, supported, and less alone. Conversations have the power to reduce stigma, increase awareness, and connect people to support. You don't need to be an expert to make a difference. Sometimes simply checking in and listening can be the key to real and lasting change.

Start with empathy. Listen with curiosity. Respond without judgment. Support with respect. Often, the most powerful conversation starter isn't having the perfect words. It's creating a space where someone feels safe enough to share their truth.

CONVERSATION TIPS FOR SOMEONE YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT

Lead with care, not assumptions

Try saying:

- "I've been thinking about you lately. How are things going?"
- "You don't seem like yourself. Is everything okay?"
- "I wanted to check in and see how you're doing."

Choose a private and appropriate time and place

People are more likely to feel comfortable when they feel safe and won't be overheard or interrupted.

Listen more than you talk

Resist the urge to solve the problem. Often, the most helpful thing you can do is listen.

Try saying:

- "Thank you for sharing that with me."
- "That sounds really difficult."
- "I'm glad you told me."

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Avoid judgment

People may stay in unhealthy or abusive relationships for many complex reasons. Judgment can shut down communication.

Avoid judgemental language:

- "Why don't you just leave?"
- "I would never put up with that."

Instead, try saying:

- "You know your situation best."
- "What kind of support would be helpful right now?"

Respect their choices

Support means empowering someone to make their own decisions, even if they aren't ready to take action at this time.

Follow up

A single conversation can make a difference, but ongoing support matters too.

Try saying:

- "I've been thinking about our conversation. How are you doing today?"
- "Just wanted to check in and see how you're doing."

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CONVERSATION STARTERS

With a friend:

- "I noticed you've seemed stressed recently. Is there anything that would be helpful to talk about?"
- "I've been thinking about you lately and wanted to check in. How are you really doing?"
- "I've noticed you've had a lot going on. How are you holding up?"
- "I care about you and wanted to see how things have been feeling for you recently."
- "I don't need all the details, but I want to let you know I'm here to listen if you ever want to talk."
- "Is there anything you've been carrying that you'd like to talk through?"
- "No pressure, but if something's weighing on you, I'm here to listen when you're ready."

With a colleague:

- "I wanted to check in and see how you're doing. How have things been lately?"
- "You've seemed like you're juggling a lot. How are you holding up?"
- "I just wanted to make sure you're doing okay. How has your week been?"
- "No need to share anything you're not comfortable with, but I wanted to check in."
- "I've appreciated working with you and wanted to see how you're doing beyond work."
- "You seem to have a lot on your plate. Is there anything you'd like to talk about?"
- "How are things going for you these days, both in and outside of work?"
- "What kind of support would feel helpful right now?"

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With an adult family member:

- "I care about you and wanted to see how things have been going lately."
- "You don't have to handle everything on your own. How are you feeling these days?"
- "I've noticed you've seemed stressed, and I just wanted to check in."
- "Is there anything you've been going through that you'd like someone to listen to?"
- "I wanted to create some space to check in. How are you really doing?"
- "You matter to me, and I want to know how you're feeling."
- "What has been the hardest part of your week lately?"

'When you are concerned about someone's relationship:

- "How are you feeling in your relationship these days?"
- "How do you feel after spending time with your partner?"
- "Are there times when you don't feel heard or respected?"
- "Do you feel supported when things get difficult?"
- "Are there any challenges in your relationship that you've been carrying alone?"
- "What do you wish people understood about what you've been experiencing?"

Follow up questions:

These are especially helpful when someone begins to open up.

- "Can you tell me a little more about that?"
- "What has that been like for you?"
- "How did that make you feel?"
- "That sounds really difficult. What has helped you get through it?"
- "Thank you for sharing that with me."
- "What do you need most right now?"
- "How can I best support you?"
- "Would you like me to just listen, or would it be helpful to brainstorm options together?"
- "What would feeling supported look like for you?"
- "I'm glad you told me. Is there anything else you'd like me to know?"