

# How to Help Someone in Distress

## Starting the conversation:

"I've noticed \_\_\_\_\_, and I'm wondering how you're doing"

"I just want to check in and see how things are going for you"

"I'd like to talk to you about [something I noticed]. Is that OK?"

"I care, and I'm concerned"



## Questions to better understand what is going on:

"Help me understand what's going on"

"Tell me more about \_\_\_\_\_."

"Seems like \_\_\_\_\_. Is that accurate?"

"How is this affecting other areas of your life (e.g. eating, sleeping, relationships, school)?"



## Is this an emergency? Are you worried about the person's safety?

- Is the person behaving in a threatening or violent manner?
- Are you concerned about the safety of the person? Directly ask:  
"Are you thinking about hurting or killing yourself?"

"Sometimes when people are really struggling, they think about hurting or killing themselves. Have you been thinking about either of these?"



## If YES:

### Some things you can say:

"Right now, I'm concerned about you and want to make sure you get what you need. I am not the best person for this, so let's contact someone who is."

"Let's figure out together how to get you the help you need right now."

"Help is available. Let's get it."

**Give them 24/7 Emergency Crisis Resources.**



**If NO:** *(Not concerned about immediate safety, but they are having a difficult time and could use some support)*

**Ask:** "How can I best support/help you right now?"

### Work the problem:

"What would be helpful today? What would better look like?"

"What has worked for you in the past?"

"Would you like to talk to someone about some options?"

### Make a plan and take action:

"What's the next step? What's one thing you can do in the next 24 hours?"

"Who are the people in your life that can support you in this?"

"What resources would be most helpful in this situation?"



Give the person the **Mental Health Information, Support, and Crisis Resources** handout and consider making a written plan of action.

**Check back with the person at a later date.** "How have things been going since we last talked?"



**Health,  
Counseling,  
& Wellness  
Services**

# Mental Health Information, Support, and Crisis Resources

## Mental Health Information

**Signs of Distress** are changes in personality, mood, performance, actions, or habits.

**These may look like:**

- Irritability or agitation
- Excessive worry
- Withdrawing from friends/family
- Loss of energy or desire to do things
- Difficulty making decisions
- Crying
- Poor hygiene
- Changes in eating, exercise, sleeping, social, or academic behaviors
- Increased alcohol or drug use

## Support Information

**Helping Dos:**

- Educate yourself
- Be available
- Act sooner rather than later
- Start the conversation and be open to talking about it
- Listen carefully and pay attention
- Ask questions
- Be non-judgmental, patient, calm, and accepting
- Express concern and support
- Be natural, be yourself
- Ask what you can do to help
- Recognize your boundaries
- Ask about suicidal thoughts and take them seriously
- Involve others if needed
- Suggest resources and offer to help connecting them to those resources
- Problem solve and create a plan for action
- Stay involved, check in with them
- Take care of yourself

## 24/7 Emergency Crisis Resources:

If it is an emergency, please do not hesitate to call 911.

**Crisis Response for Southeast Minnesota**  
Call 1.844.CRISIS2 (1.844.274.7472)

**Great Rivers 2-1-1**  
Call 1.800.362.8255

**Crisis Text Line**  
Text "HOME" to 741741

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**  
1.800.273.TALK (8255)

**Steve Fund (Support for Young People of Color)**  
Text "STEVE" to 741741

**The Trevor Project (Support for LGBTQIA+)**  
Call 1.866.488.7386  
Text "START" to 678678

**Advocacy Center of Winona**  
Call 507.452.4452



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