

b1oke

saving men's lives

top b1oke toolkit

Tips on how to check on your mates

Small steps that could change a life

Signs that someone is not ok...

- Many people struggle to cope at one point or another of their lives. Reaching out to someone could help them know that someone cares, that they are valued, and help them access the support they need. We want to help equip men to have this conversation from both sides.
- Everyone copes and reacts in their own way, but here are some general signs to look out for. For some people, several of these signs might apply - for others just one or two, or none.

Signs that someone is not ok...

- Feeling restless and agitated
- Feeling angry and aggressive
- Feeling tearful
- Being tired or lacking in energy
- Not wanting to talk to or be with people
- Not wanting to do things they usually enjoy
- Using alcohol or drugs to cope with feelings
- Finding it hard to cope with everyday things
- Not replying to messages or being distant
- Talking about feeling hopeless, helpless or worthless
- Talking about feeling trapped by life circumstances they can't see a way out of, or feeling unable to escape their thoughts
- A change in routine, such as sleeping or eating more or less than normal
- Engaging in risk-taking behaviour, like gambling or violence

You might not always be able to spot these signs, especially as people start to physically self-isolate because of coronavirus. These emotions may be more difficult to spot if you're seeing less of the people you're close to.

It can also be useful to identify circumstances that can trigger suicidal thoughts or make it hard for someone to cope. Situations to look out for:

- loss, including loss of a friend or a family member through bereavement
- suicide or attempted suicide of family member, friend or public figure
- relationship and family problems
- housing problems
- financial worries
- job-related stress
- study-related pressures
- bullying, abuse or neglect
- loneliness and isolation
- challenging current events
- depression
- painful and/or disabling physical illness
- heavy use of or dependency on alcohol or other drugs
- injury or dropped from team
- becoming a father

Again, these may not apply to everyone who is struggling, but they can be useful to look out for.

What to do if you think someone is struggling

- Many people worry that reaching out will be intrusive or make things worse. You'll soon be able to tell if the person you're speaking to isn't comfortable or doesn't want to have that kind of conversation. If they don't want to open up, you'll still have let them know you're there for them.
- Once someone starts to share how they're feeling, it's important to listen. This could mean not offering advice, not trying to identify what they're going through with your own experiences and not trying to solve their problems

If you spot any behavioural changes or potential warning signs, and you want to ask if they are ok? This is for you.

Be Ready

- Are you in a good headspace?
- Are you willing to genuinely listen?
- Can you give as much time as needed?

Be prepared

- Remember that you won't have all the answers (which is OK)
- Listening is one of the most important things you can do
- If someone is talking about personal struggles this can be difficult and they might be emotional, embarrassed or upset.

Pick your moment

- Have you chosen somewhere relatively private and informal?
- What time will be good for them to chat? Ideally try and put aside 30 minutes so the conversation isn't rushed
- You might find that during breaks, one-on-one catch ups or before/after shifts are good times to chat
- If they can't talk when you approach them, suggest another time to have a conversation
- It might be more comfortable for the person to be side-by-side with you (e.g. walking together or driving rather than face-to-face).

Tips on how to have that conversation with someone who is struggling...

- **B**e there for them...
- **L**isten with an open mind...
- **O**pen ended questions...
- **K**eep checking in...
- **E**xtra help or support...

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You are not there to solve problems, just listen without judgement and encourage action and signpost

Be there for them...

- Be relaxed, friendly and concerned in your approach.
- Help them open up by asking questions like "How are you going?" or "What's been happening?"
- Mention specific things that have made you concerned for them, like "You seem less chatty than usual. How are you going?"
- IF
- If they don't want to talk, don't criticise them.
- Tell them you're still concerned about changes in their behaviour and you care about them.
- Avoid a confrontation.
- You could say: "Please call me if you ever want to chat" or "Is there someone else you'd rather talk to?"

Listen with an open mind

- Take what they say seriously and don't interrupt or rush the conversation.
- Don't judge their experiences or reactions but acknowledge that things seem tough for them.
- If they need time to think, sit patiently with the silence.
- Encourage them to explain: "How are you feeling about that?" or "How long have you felt that way?"
- Show that you've listened by repeating back what you've heard (in your own words) and ask if you have understood them properly.

Open ended questions...

- Ask: "What have you done in the past to manage similar situations?"
- Ask: "How would you like me to support you?"
- Ask: "What's something you can do for yourself right now? Something that's enjoyable or relaxing?"
- You could say: "When I was going through a difficult time, I tried this... You might find it useful too."
- If they've been feeling really down for more than 2 weeks, encourage them to see a health professional. You could say, "It might be useful to link in with someone who can support you. I'm happy to assist you to find the right person to talk to."
- Be positive about the role of professionals in getting through tough times.

Keep checking in...

- Pop a reminder in your diary to call them in a couple of weeks. If they're really struggling, follow up with them sooner.
- You could say: "I've been thinking of you and wanted to know how you've been going since we last chatted."
- Ask if they've found a better way to manage the situation. If they haven't done anything, don't judge them. They might just need someone to listen to them for the moment.
- Stay in touch and be there for them. Genuine care and concern can make a real difference.

Extra help or support...

Some conversations are too big for family and friends to take on alone. If someone's been really low for more than 2 weeks - or is at risk - please contact a professional as soon as you can.

Emergency Services: 999 – This number is to be called when you or someone you know is a danger to themselves/yourself or others

The Crisis Resolution and Home Treatment Team: 0300 300 1010 -Provides a rapid assessment for those people who are experiencing a mental health crisis of such severity that without the intervention of the team, a hospital admission would be required.

Samaritans Leicester: 116123 – Provides emotional support to anyone in emotional distress, struggling to cope, or at risk of suicide

Central Access Point: 0808 800 3302 – If you are in need of urgent NHS mental health support you should call Mental Health Central Access Point, open 24/7

What to do if they don't want to speak with you...

- Try not to take it personally if they don't want to talk. They might not be ready to talk or it might take them time to realise that you genuinely care
- Respect their decision not to talk; don't force them into it or criticise them
- Focus on some things they might be comfortable talking about like, "I know you've had trouble sleeping and concentrating lately. Can we talk about that?"
- Suggest they talk to someone they trust, like a family member or friend. You could say, "You can always call me if you ever want to chat. But is there someone else you'd rather talk to?"
- Ask if you can check in with them again soon.

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5 things to remember...

1. Ask questions and listen

Asking questions can give the person space to express how they're feeling and what they're going through, and it will help you to understand their experience better. Try to ask questions that are open and not leading or judgemental – such as “how does that affect you” or “what does it feel like?”

2. Think about the time & place

Sometimes it's easier to talk side by side rather than face to face. So, if you do talk in person, you might want to chat while you are doing something else. You could start a conversation when you're walking, cooking or stuck in traffic. However, don't let the search for the perfect place put you off!

3. Don't try & fix it

It can be hard to see someone you care about having a difficult time but try to resist the urge to offer quick fixes to what they're going through. Learning to manage or recover from a mental health problem can be a long journey, and they've likely already considered lots of different tools and strategies. Just talking can be really powerful, so unless they've asked for advice directly, it might be best just to listen.

4. Treat them the same

When someone has a mental health problem, they're still the same person as they were before. And that means when a friend or loved one opens up about mental health, they don't want to be treated any differently. If you want to support them, keep it simple. Do the things you'd normally do.

5. Be patient

No matter how hard you try, some people might not be ready to talk about what they're going through. That's ok – the fact that you've tried to talk to them about it may make it easier for them to open up another time.

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**Men's Mental
Fitness Community**