

MINDSET PRACTICAL GUIDE 01

Supporting a mate who's struggling

A straightforward guide to noticing when something may be wrong, starting a conversation, listening well and helping someone connect with the right support.

YOU DO NOT NEED TO

have all the answers.

NOTICE • ASK • LISTEN • STAY CONNECTED

mindsetcharity.org.uk

1 • NOTICE

Notice the change

There is no single sign that tells you someone is struggling. What matters most is a change from what is normal for them - especially when several changes appear together or persist.

What you might notice

- Pulling away from friends or usual activities
- Becoming unusually quiet, irritable or angry
- Looking exhausted or saying they cannot switch off
- Drinking or using substances more than usual
- Work, study or everyday tasks starting to slip

What you might hear

- "I'm done with all this."
- "What's the point?"
- "I'm just a burden."
- "I can't cope."
- Jokes or comments about disappearing, dying or not being around

TRUST THE CHANGE, NOT THE STEREOTYPE

Someone does not have to look sad, cry, miss work or say "I am depressed" to need support. Some people keep functioning while struggling privately. If your instinct says something is different, it is reasonable to check in.

A useful rule: look for change + duration + impact

- Change: Are they noticeably different from their usual self?
- Duration: Has it lasted more than a bad day or two?
- Impact: Is it affecting sleep, relationships, work, study, money or safety?

2 • ASK

Start the conversation

You do not need a perfect opening line. A calm, specific observation is often better than a big speech. Pick a reasonably private moment and make it easy for them to answer honestly.

TRY SOMETHING SIMPLE

"You haven't seemed yourself lately. I've noticed you've been quieter and cancelling plans. How are things, really?"

Good conversation starters

- "I've noticed you seem under a lot of pressure. Want to talk?"
- "You don't have to explain everything, but I'm here if you want company."
- "I'm not going to judge you. I just want to know how you're doing."
- "What has been the hardest part of the last few days?"

Do

Ask one question at a time.

Leave space for silence.

Use their words rather than labels.

Take "I'm fine" as a possible first answer, not necessarily the final one.

Avoid

"Cheer up."

"Other people have it worse."

Turning the conversation into your own story too quickly.

Interrogating them or demanding an explanation.

3 • LISTEN

Listen without rushing to fix it

When someone finally talks, the most helpful response is often not advice. It is showing that you have heard them, that you can tolerate the conversation, and that they do not have to carry it alone.

01

Give them room

Let them finish. Do not fill every silence or immediately jump to solutions.

02

Reflect back

Try: "That sounds exhausting" or "It makes sense that you're feeling overwhelmed."

03

Clarify, don't assume

Ask: "What would be most helpful from me right now - listening, company or helping you work out a next step?"

04

Keep the door open

If they stop talking, you can say: "That's okay. We can come back to it. I'm still here."

REMEMBER

Listening is not agreeing with everything someone says. It is creating enough safety for them to be honest - which makes the next helpful step more possible.

4 • HELP

Offer practical support

When someone is overwhelmed, vague offers such as “let me know if you need anything” can be hard to act on. Small, concrete choices reduce the effort needed to accept help.

Company

“Want me to come round for a tea?”

“Fancy a walk? No pressure to talk.”

Practical

“Want me to help you make that call?”

“Shall we sort one thing together?”

Connection

“Would it help if I sat with you while you contact your GP?”

“Who else could be part of your support?”

Make the next step specific

- Agree a check-in: “I’ll message you tomorrow after work.”
- Reduce the task: focus on one call, one appointment, one meal, one walk, one piece of paperwork.
- Encourage professional support: a GP, NHS service, counsellor or relevant specialist service may be appropriate.
- Share the load: where possible, help them identify more than one trusted person. You should not have to become their only source of support.

SUPPORT DOES NOT MEAN TAKING OVER

Keep their choices and independence in the conversation. You can offer options, help with access and stay alongside them without trying to run their life.

5 • SAFETY

If you are worried about immediate safety

If someone says they want to die, says others would be better off without them, has a plan to harm themselves, or you believe they may be in immediate danger, treat it seriously.

IT IS OK TO ASK DIRECTLY

“Are you thinking about suicide?” Asking clearly does not put the idea into someone’s head. It gives them permission to answer honestly and helps you understand how urgent the situation may be.

If the danger seems immediate

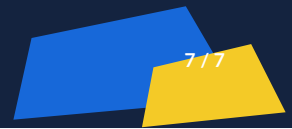
- Call 999 or go to A&E.; If you can do so safely, stay with the person while urgent help is being arranged.
- Do not promise to keep a life-threatening risk secret. Explain that you care too much to leave them without support.
- For urgent mental health help in England that is not a life-threatening emergency, call NHS 111 and select the mental health option.

24/7 listening support

Samaritans 116 123

Free to call, day or night, in the UK and Ireland. Samaritans provides confidential emotional support and a listening ear.

This guide is general information, not a clinical assessment or substitute for professional care. Urgent-help information checked against NHS England and Samaritans sources in August 2026.



The 4-step check-in

Save this page, print it or keep the four steps in mind when you are worried about someone.

1

NOTICE

Name the change you have seen without diagnosing them.

"You haven't seemed yourself lately."

2

ASK

Ask an open question, then be willing to ask directly about safety if you are worried.

"How are things, really?"

3

LISTEN

Do not rush to fix it. Reflect back, clarify and let them set the pace.

"What would help most right now?"

4

CONNECT

Agree one next step and one follow-up. Bring in professional or urgent help when needed.

"I'll check in tomorrow."

MINDSET

Practical support. Positive people. Real-life tools.
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