



Having a conversation



Is this really my role?

Many people feel responsible for caring for the person they love and for encouraging them to seek help. However, it is important to consider whether this is the right time to have a conversation about getting help and whether you are the best person to be having this conversation.

Complete the checklist below to see if this is the right time to have a conversation with your loved one.

Is this the right time to talk?

- ☐ Have we just had an argument?
- ☐ Am I feeling tired?
- ☐ Are the children around?
 - » Can they hear us or walk in on us?
- ☐ Have either of us been drinking alcohol/using other substances?
- ☐ Is there only a short period of time available to have this conversation?
- ☐ Am I feeling really angry/frustrated at the moment?
- ☐ Are we trying to start this conversation late at night, or while we are in bed?

If you tick any box on the list, it may be best to wait for a better time to start the conversation.

Now complete the next checklist to see if it is safe to have a conversation.

Is it safe to have a conversation?

- ☐ Around my loved one, I feel like I am always 'walking on eggshells'
- ☐ My loved one has a really short fuse and easily loses their temper
- ☐ When I ask personal questions, my loved one shouts back at me
- ☐ My loved one has been particularly angry/aggressive towards me recently
- ☐ Simple conversations easily turn into arguments
- ☐ When I try to talk to them about their behaviour, they turn it back on me. For example they tell me things like "you're trying to ruin my night" or tell me that the problems I bring up are my fault.

If you have ticked any box on the list, it may not be safe to have a conversation about getting help. You may need to ask other people you trust to support you or even have the conversation instead of you.

If you are feeling unsafe or are worried about the immediate safety of a loved one, **dial 000**.

Safety resources

Help is available from services that deal with family violence like 1800RESPECT, your doctor, the Defence Member and Family Helpline (DMFS), Open Arms, and Relationships Australia.

The Defence Member and Family Helpline is available 24/7 at **1800 624 608** or via email at memberandfamilyhelpline@defence.gov.au.

The ADF can provide temporary 'safe house' accommodation for the dependants of ADF members in situations of family and domestic violence. You can initiate a request for Special Accommodation for Emergencies (SAFE) by contacting the member and Family Helpline on **1800 624 608**. More information about this can be found here:

<https://www.defence.gov.au/adf-members-families/health-well-being/services-support-fighting-fit/family-and-domestic-violence-support> or

<https://www.defence.gov.au/adf-members-families/engagement/defence-member-and-family-helpline>

https://www.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-08/dmfs_family-domestic-violence.pdf

ADF - All hours Support Line – **1800 628 036**.

1800RESPECT at **1800 737 732**. This national service is open 24/7 to support people impacted by domestic, family, or sexual violence.

Open Arms provides free and confidential counselling to anyone who has served at least one day in the ADF and their families. <https://www.openarms.gov.au/>
Phone: **1800 011 046** available 24/7

Relationships Australia is an organisation that provides relationship support services for individuals, families, and communities. It aims to support Australians to achieve positive and respectful relationships.
<https://relationships.org.au/> or Phone: **1300 364 277**

Plan when to have a conversation

It is important to plan when to have a conversation to encourage your loved one to get help. There are practical things you can do to prepare for a conversation.

- » Check for safety and think about practical aspects of the conversation:
 - » where will it take place?
 - » is there a neutral space where we both feel safe and have privacy?
 - » when would be a good time - is there a time during the week when things are less rushed, or the kids are not home?
 - » what would work as an exit strategy if things got heated? Think about what you want to say to end a conversation calmly. e.g., *"It looks like we're both getting upset, how about we have a break and talk later today when we've had a chance to think?"*
- » Plan what you want to say. It's important that you are able to communicate how your loved one's mental health issues are affecting you without being judgemental. e.g., *"I find it tough when you withdraw and play on the computer when you're stressed. I'm telling you this because I want us to have time together."*
- » Be prepared to stand firm on the issues that matter the most to you but also be aware of where you're willing to compromise.

Tips for engaging people at the right time

People who experience mental health issues must be ready to admit to themselves that they need help before they can listen to the advice or concerns of others. It's not always easy to tell when a person is ready to talk. Sometimes a person is prepared to admit they have a problem but they're afraid to change or to get help. Other people are willing to get help, but they are not sure it will improve things for them.

Readiness to get help

Not ready to talk

If your loved one:

- » does not acknowledge there is any problem
- » cannot admit that they are not coping
- » becomes angry, defensive or changes the subject when you notice their distress or mention there is a problem

Tips for having effective conversations

You may need to:

- » tell yourself that they are not ready to admit the problem to themselves and are unlikely to respond to requests to get help
- » keep watching for signs that they are ready to talk
- » be clear about your needs and behaviours that you don't like without making a judgement: "Please don't raise your voice", or "I would like us to see our friends more often". This may help your loved one see that there is a problem over time.

Ready to talk but unsure about getting help

If your loved one:

- » realises that they are not coping but is unsure about changing: *"I know I shouldn't get so angry, but people are so unreasonable"; "I shouldn't gamble but I don't think I can stop"*
- » is not sure they have reached the point where they need help: *"Things are not how they used to be but I'll make an effort and things will get better"*
- » is not sure they have reached the point where they need help: *"Things are not how they used to be but I'll make an effort and things will get better"*
- » doesn't believe seeing someone will help them: *"I don't think talking will help me feel better", "Steve went to counselling for years and he's still got a drinking problem"*

Ready to get help with some encouragement

If your loved one:

- » recognises there is a problem and wants to change: *"I know I've grown distant, but I want to be close to you again"*
- » understands the consequences of their behavior: *"I know my anger scares the kids and I don't want them to be afraid of me"*
- » is starting to think about the future and how things might improve: *"if I stop drinking so much, I will feel more in control"*

You may need to:

- » listen to your loved one's perspective
- » ask questions to help them clarify how the mental health problem is affecting them and what they would like to see change, e.g.: *"How have things changed since you started drinking?" "What would be different if you weren't drinking so much?"*
- » not offer advice or tell them they "should" do something.
- » acknowledge the step they have taken when admitting they have a problem, e.g.: *"I really appreciate you telling me about how things have been difficult for you"*
- » share stories of people getting help

You may need to:

- » recognise what they would like to change without rushing to provide solutions, e.g., *"It's great that you want to be close to the kids. Is there anything you particularly want to do with them?"*
- » discuss what can change if they get help, e.g., *"If you see a counsellor, they can help you with your sleep. We might be able to go for a morning run together again"*
- » help your loved one explore support options
- » let them make their own decisions
- » notice and mention any positive changes

Tips for communicating

- » Listen without judgement. Listening does not mean you're agreeing with what your loved one says.
- » Allow your loved one to finish talking before you speak. Only when your loved one feels fully heard will they be ready to listen to you.
- » Make sure you have understood what your loved one was trying to say before making any suggestions. Describing what you have understood helps your loved one feel heard and allows them to clear up any misunderstanding.
- » Voice how you feel. Don't assume your loved one knows how you are feeling or what you're thinking.
- » Keep the heat out of the conversation (remain calm, exhale a deep breath before responding, do not yell or try to start a verbal fight)
- » Use 'I' statements – refer to yourself and your own reactions rather than assigning blame. For example, *"I feel XX when YY happens", rather than accusations like "You*

keep doing the same thing over and over even when you've said you'd stop" or "You need to get yourself together"

- » Tell your loved one what you do want, not just what you don't want. *'I want you to listen to how I am feeling and to understand what you can do to help me when I am feeling upset.'*

To access DMFS support services or products:



1800 624 608



MemberAndFamilyHelpline@defence.gov.au



www.defence.gov.au/adf-members-families



@DefenceMemberandFamilySupport



@dmfs_australia



www.forcenet.gov.au