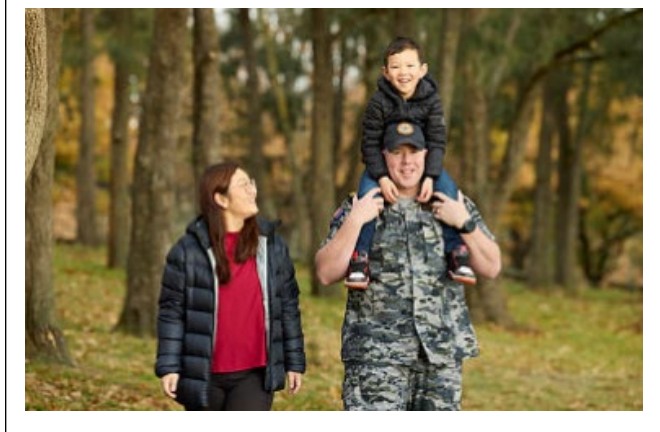


Having a Conversation Toolkit

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 suitable 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.



- ☐ 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 or using other substances?
- ☐ Is there only a short period of time available to have this conversation?
- ☐ Am I feeling really angry or frustrated at the moment?
- ☐ Are we trying to start this conversation late at night or while we are in bed?

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

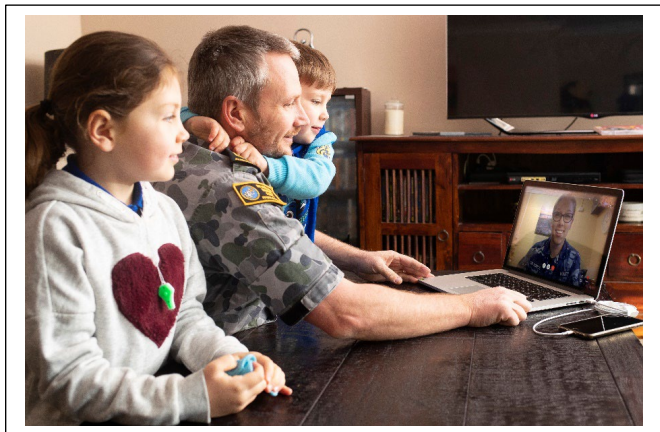
- ☐ Around my loved one, I feel like I am always 'walking on eggshells'.
- ☐ My loved one has a really short fuse and easily loses their temper.
- ☐ When I ask personal questions, my loved one shouts back at me.
- ☐ My loved one has been particularly angry and aggressive towards me recently.
- ☐ Simple 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 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 think about your own safety. You may need to ask other people you trust to support you or even have the conversation instead of you.

If you have assessed that you can safely have the conversation, find out practical tips to ensure that your loved one is ready to talk in the next section: 'It's all in the ... timing'.

It's all in the timing

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 such 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 at 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.
- 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.

Refer to the below strategies that can help you have an effective conversation.

Tips for communicating

There are simple things you can do to improve the chances that your conversation has a positive outcome.

Here are some examples of how other people have effectively had an initial conversation to encourage a loved one to get help.

- 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."

Once you have planned having a conversation with your loved one, it's important to make sure you have people around you who can support you and your loved one when you start looking for help.

Know your allies

When encouraging someone you care about to seek help, it is important to have people who you can reach out to for support and who can help you talk to your loved one.

You may also need to think about your own safety.

Choose people who:

- Can support you and the person you are encouraging to seek help.
- Can talk about the benefits of getting help, particularly if they have got support themselves or know someone who has.
- Are trusted by both you and your loved one and will not take sides.



Be aware that some people may prefer to keep things the way they are and may not be good allies even if they are close to you or your loved one.