

for when someone you care about is struggling

Supporting *a Friend*

*“hey, are
you okay?”*

*you don't have
to fix it*

If you or your friend are in danger right now, call **000**. For support any time, call Kids Helpline on **1800 55 1800** or Lifeline on **13 11 14**.

Practical, gentle ways to show up for someone: what to say, how to listen, when to bring in more help, and how to look after yourself. You don't need all the answers, and you don't have to carry it alone.



what's inside

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how to use this: read it start to finish, or jump to the part you need right now. Keep it somewhere handy. If you're worried about someone's safety today, go straight to **section 6** (page 7).

The short version

1

Notice

Check in when something seems different.

2

Listen

Let them talk. You don't need to fix it.

3

Ask

Find out what would help, and offer options.

4

Bring others in

If it's bigger than you, involve a trusted adult or service.

IF IT'S URGENT, YOU CAN CALL

000

Emergency: police, ambulance, fire

1800 55 1800

Kids Helpline, ages 5–25, 24/7

13 11 14

Lifeline, 24/7 (text 0477 13 11 14)

13 92 76

13YARN, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people



start here

Before you start

If someone has come to you, that already means something: they trust you. This guide won't turn you into a counsellor, and it isn't meant to. It's here to help you be a good friend, which is a different and genuinely valuable thing.

Helping a friend who is having a tough time can be as simple as checking in and letting them know you care. They don't have to open up to you. Knowing they have a friend who has their back can still be a real source of strength, now and later on.

What this is (and isn't)

IT IS

- ✦ Plain-language ideas for what to say, how to listen and how to help someone find support.
- ✦ Written by young people, for young people, and checked against advice from headspace, ReachOut, Beyond Blue and Kids Helpline.
- ✦ For any kind of tough time: stress, sadness, worry, things at home or school.

IT IS NOT

- ✦ Professional or medical advice, or a replacement for a counsellor, GP or helpline.
- ✦ A way to diagnose what's going on for your friend.
- ✦ A promise that you can, or should, handle everything on your own.

Three things to remember

Show up

Checking in, listening and staying in touch already help.

Don't fix

You don't need the perfect answer. Being there is the help.

Bring others in

If you're worried about their safety, tell a trusted adult. That's what good friends do.

tip: this guide sits alongside our **Health Navigator** (how to find and book a service) and the **Self-Advocacy Journal** (how to say what's going on). Both are free at thealetheiaproject.org.



reaching out

Starting the conversation

2.1 Notice what's changed

Have you noticed a change in them lately? Maybe they're quieter, pulling away from friends, missing things they used to love, sleeping a lot more or less, or seem more on edge than usual. You don't need to be sure anything is wrong to check in.

Being honest about what you've noticed, in a kind way, shows real care without sounding vague or judgemental. The goal isn't to make them talk. It's to make sure they know there's someone they can trust.

TRY SAYING

"I've noticed you've seemed a bit quiet lately. How are you going, really?"

TRY SAYING

"You haven't been coming to training as much lately. Is everything okay?"

2.2 Find the right time

- ★ Pick a moment when you're unlikely to be interrupted, so they have space to talk.
- ★ It doesn't have to be a big sit-down conversation. A walk, a hangout or a message can feel easier, especially side by side rather than face to face.
- ★ Offer options. People have different needs, and choice makes it easier to say yes.

TRY SAYING

"You sound like you've had a long day. Want to chat tomorrow instead? I'm free in the morning."

TRY SAYING

"We don't have to meet up. If a call or messaging is easier, that works too."

2.3 Don't expect a specific answer

They might not be ready to talk, and that's completely normal. By noticing and asking, you've shown you're willing to listen when they are. If they push back, try not to take it personally. Working out how they feel, and whether to share it, can take time.

Keep in touch and keep checking in, whether they open up or not. There may be a chance to talk later.

TRY SAYING

"That's okay. Just know you can reach out to me whenever you want to."

TRY SAYING

"Want to keep in touch and do something together sometime? No need to talk about anything."



just be there

Listening without fixing

Wanting to jump straight to solutions is natural. But often the most helpful thing you can do first is simply listen. Sitting with someone while they go through something hard is already support.

- ★ **Let them finish.** Jumping in with advice can make someone feel rushed, dismissed or unheard.
- ★ **They may still be working out how they feel.** They might not want a plan yet, just someone to hear them.
- ★ **Small responses go a long way.** "That sounds really hard" or "Thank you for telling me" help people feel safe to keep sharing.
- ★ **There's no textbook answer.** Everyone's situation is different, so there isn't always a clear next step, and that's okay.

a small scenario

A friend messages you:

"I don't really know why I'm telling you this, but I haven't been okay lately."

You don't need the perfect reply. Something like *"I'm really glad you told me. Do you want to talk about it, or would you like some company right now?"* already does a lot.

3.1 Encouraging them while you listen

REASSURE, HONESTLY

Let them know they're not alone, without promising things will be fine.

"I'm here for you. You're not going through this alone."

VALIDATE HOW THEY FEEL

You don't have to agree with everything to show you understand.

"It sounds like you've been having a really rough time."

STAY CURIOUS

Ask about their experience rather than assuming.

"How is that affecting you?" · "Does that make you want to do anything about it?"

ASK, DON'T TELL

Ask what they need instead of throwing out suggestions.

"Is there anything I can do to help?" · "Is there anything you've tried already?"

tip: if they mention seeing a doctor or counsellor, you can gently support it: *"That sounds like a good idea. Would it help if I came with you, or helped you book?"* If it feels right, you can also ask: *"Have you thought about seeing a GP? If you'd like to, I can help."* More on that in section 5.



the words

What supportive language sounds like

INSTEAD OF...	TRY...
"It could be worse."	<i>"That sounds really tough. I'm sorry you're going through this."</i>
"Just try to stay positive!"	<i>"You don't have to be okay right now. I'm here either way."</i>
"Have you tried [quick fix]?"	<i>"Do you want ideas, or would you rather I just listen?"</i>
"Why didn't you tell me sooner?"	<i>"I'm really glad you told me now."</i>
Going quiet because you don't know what to say	<i>"I don't know exactly what to say, but I'm really glad you told me."</i>

4.1 What to avoid, even with good intentions

COMPARING

"At least it's not as bad as..." or "Someone I know had it worse" can make them feel their problem doesn't count.

MINIMISING

"Don't worry about it so much" or "Why do you care so much?" can shut the conversation down.

PROMISING SECRECY

Don't promise to keep something secret before you know what it is. See section 6.

TAKING OVER

Making decisions for them, or telling them what they "should" do, can make them feel less in control.

4.2 It's okay to sit in silence

You never have to have a response ready. A pause can feel awkward, but it gives you both space to take in what's been said. If they seem stuck or pressured, let them know it's okay to slow down.

TRY SAYING

"This must be really hard to talk about."

TRY SAYING

"Take your time. There's no rush."

TRY SAYING

"We can pause and come back to this whenever you're ready."

If it feels right, you can follow their lead and gently ask more about something they've mentioned.

TRY SAYING

"How did you feel when that happened?"

TRY SAYING

"How do you think that's been affecting you?"

next steps



Asking what they need, and helping them get support

5.1 Ask, don't guess

People need different things at different times: sometimes advice, sometimes just company. Asking directly is almost always better than guessing, and asking is itself a way of showing support.

TRY SAYING

"Do you want me to just listen, or help you work out what to do?"

TRY SAYING

"What would actually help you most right now?"

TRY SAYING

"Would you like some space, or would you rather not be alone right now?"

5.2 Helping them reach more support

- ★ **Offer, don't push.** You can help them find a service without pressuring them to use it. Let them stay in the driver's seat, because options usually feel better than instructions.

- ✦ **Make the first step smaller.** Offering to sit with them while they call, or to go with them to a first appointment, can make a hard step much easier.
- ✦ **Good places to start:** a GP, a school counsellor or wellbeing team, a headspace centre (ages 12–25), or a helpline like Kids Helpline. Our **Health Navigator** explains how to find and book these.

a small scenario

Your friend says they want to talk to someone, but they're nervous about booking an appointment. What can you do?

- ✦ Offer to sit with them while they book online or call.
- ✦ Help them write down what they want to say first. The Self-Advocacy Journal has pages for this.
- ✦ Ask if they'd like you to come along, and wait outside if they'd prefer.

TRY SAYING

“Would it help if I sat with you while you call?”

TRY SAYING

“I could come with you to your first appointment, if that would help.”

5.3 If they're not keen on getting help

Suggesting help won't always go down well, and that's okay. If what they're going through sounds serious, it's still worth being gentle but direct. You're not abandoning them, and it isn't your job to fix it. Helping them reach someone who can help is a way of staying by their side.

TRY SAYING

“Of course I still want to support you as your friend. I just want to make sure you're getting the help you need.”

TRY SAYING

“I'm here to listen, but this sounds really heavy. I think talking to a GP or counsellor could really help.”

good to know: you can call Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800) yourself to ask how to support a friend. You don't have to be the one in crisis to call.



safety first

Privacy, and when to get more help

Most of what a friend shares with you can stay between you. But sometimes keeping something private isn't the safest thing for them, even if they've asked you to.

THE ONE SECRET NOT TO KEEP

If you think your friend might not be safe, or might hurt themselves or someone else, **tell a trusted adult** (a parent, carer, teacher, school counsellor or coach) or **contact a support service**, even if they've asked you not to. If someone is in immediate danger, **call 000**.

You can be honest with your friend about it:

TRY SAYING

"I care about you too much to keep this to myself. I think we should get some help, and I'll be with you."

Getting an adult or professional involved isn't a betrayal. It's what a good friend does when something is bigger than the two of you. Your friend might be upset at first, and that's okay. Keeping them safe matters more, and many people are glad later that someone spoke up.

SIGNS IT'S TIME TO BRING IN A TRUSTED ADULT OR PROFESSIONAL

- ✦ **You feel overwhelmed or out of your depth.** You're their friend, not their counsellor, and that's enough.
- ✦ **They talk about coping in ways that could harm them,** or about not feeling safe.
- ✦ **It's affecting their basic self-care,** like eating, sleeping or looking after themselves.
- ✦ **It's been going on for a while** and isn't getting better.

a tricky scenario

A friend starts to tell you something:

"Don't tell anyone this, but..."

- ✦ **Be honest before they go on.** You can keep most things private, but not something that means they might not be safe.
- ✦ **You don't need all the answers.** If what they share worries you, bringing in a trusted adult or a helpline is the right thing to do.
- ✦ **Tell them what you'll do,** so it doesn't come as a surprise.

TRY SAYING

"I want to hear it. I'll keep it between us, unless I'm worried you're not safe. Then I'd need to get some help, and I'd tell you first."

a harder scenario

Late at night, a friend messages:

"I don't think I can keep going like this."

- ✦ **Take it seriously** and stay with them, by message, call or in person.
- ✦ **It's okay to ask directly** if they're thinking about suicide. Asking won't put the idea in their head, and it shows you're taking them seriously.
- ✦ **Get help together:** call Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800) or Lifeline (13 11 14), and tell a trusted adult.
- ✦ **If they're in immediate danger, call 000.**

You don't have to have the answers. You just need to make sure they're not alone and that someone who can help knows.

IF IT'S URGENT, YOU CAN CALL

000

Emergency: police,
ambulance, fire

1800 55 1800

Kids Helpline, ages 5–25, 24/7

13 11 14

Lifeline, 24/7

1300 659 467

Suicide Call Back Service,
24/7



you matter too

Looking after yourself

Supporting someone can be heavy. It's okay to need support too, and checking in on yourself isn't selfish. You can only keep showing up for someone if you're doing okay.

KNOW YOUR LIMITS

- ★ You're a friend, not a counsellor, doctor or 24/7 emergency contact.
- ★ You're not responsible for fixing their situation, and it isn't fair to expect that of yourself.
- ★ You don't have to be their only source of help. Others can share the load.
- ★ It's okay to say: *"I'm not the right person for this part. Let's find someone who is."*

LOOK AFTER YOU

- ★ Notice small changes in yourself, like sleep, mood or stress.
- ★ Keep doing the things that recharge you: rest, friends, movement, hobbies.
- ★ Talk to your own trusted adult, or call Kids Helpline, if it's getting a lot.

Encouraging your friend to talk to someone better placed to help isn't a failure on your part. It's one of the most useful things you can do.

a small scenario

You've started to dread your friend's messages. It feels heavy, and you're anxious about saying the wrong thing. What can you do?

- ★ **Notice the feeling.** It can be a sign that what they're going through is more than a friend can carry.
- ★ **Put your wellbeing first.** There's no obligation to have an answer. It's okay to step back a little.
- ★ **Point them to more support.** Encourage them to talk to a trusted adult, or a professional like a GP or counsellor, and offer to help them do it.
- ★ **Talk to someone yourself,** like your own trusted adult or Kids Helpline.

remember

EMPATHY + CONNECTION

You don't need to solve it. You just need to show up, and it's okay to bring someone else in to help.



who to contact

Where to get support

All of these are free or low-cost and confidential. You can contact them for yourself, or to ask how to help a friend.

SERVICE	CONTACT	WHO IT'S FOR
Emergency	000	If someone is in immediate danger. Police, ambulance, fire.
Kids Helpline	1800 55 1800	Young people aged 5–25. Phone and webchat, 24/7. kidshelpline.com.au
Lifeline	13 11 14	Anyone in crisis, 24/7. Text 0477 13 11 14 or chat at lifeline.org.au
headspace	headspace.org.au	Young people aged 12–25. Centres across Australia, plus ehespace online and phone support.
13YARN	13 92 76	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, 24/7, run by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
QLife	1800 184 527	LGBTIQ+ people, and anyone wanting to talk about sexuality, identity, gender, bodies or relationships.
Beyond Blue	1300 22 4636	Anyone feeling anxious or low, 24/7. beyondblue.org.au
Suicide Call Back Service	1300 659 467	Anyone affected by suicide, including people worried about someone else, 24/7.

In Victoria, free **Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals** support people aged 26 and over (betterhealth.vic.gov.au). Your school wellbeing team or GP can also help you find the right place.

Sources

1. [headspace](https://headspace.org.au), "How to help a friend going through a tough time" and "How to help a friend" (Take a Step, developed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and advisory groups). headspace.org.au
2. [Beyond Blue](https://beyondblue.org.au), "How to approach someone about their mental health" and "How to talk to someone about their mental health". beyondblue.org.au
3. [ReachOut](https://au.reachout.com), "How to ask a friend if they're okay". au.reachout.com
4. [Kids Helpline](https://kidshelpline.com.au), "Helping a friend who feels down". kidshelpline.com.au
5. [Mental Health First Aid Australia](https://mhfa.com.au), "Self-care when helping others". mhfa.com.au
6. [Better Health Channel \(Victoria\)](https://betterhealth.vic.gov.au), "Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals". betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Service details checked October 2026. Services can change, so check their websites for the latest information. This resource follows Mindframe guidance for safe communication about mental health and suicide.



your turn

A moment to reflect

Take a few minutes to jot down your thoughts. There are no right answers.

Who is someone I could talk to if I needed support with this?

What's one thing I could say next time I'm not sure what to say?

What do I need to look after myself while I support someone else?

keep this somewhere handy

*Being there is the help.
You don't have to do it
alone.*

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EMERGENCY

000

Police, ambulance, fire

ANY TIME, ANY REASON

Kids Helpline **1800 55 1800**

Lifeline **13 11 14**

13YARN **13 92 76**



THE ALETHEIA PROJECT

thealetheiaproject.org · [@aletheia.au](https://www.instagram.com/aletheia.au)

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