



5 great conversation starters to talk about **mental well-being** with your family



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Checking In



Many families have their own special routines, rituals, and traditions — and their own way of communicating and understanding each other. While maintaining positive mental health is vital for everyone in a family, conversations about mental health don't always work themselves naturally into family discussions.

Talking about mental health among family members can be difficult — and sometimes, it can seem impossible to even know where to begin. But making space to discuss mental wellbeing and health benefits any family, allowing family members to better support and understand each other. Open conversations can also help parents identify issues in a child's mental health and take important steps towards addressing issues and improving overall mental health.

The best way to begin checking in about mental health is by asking simple, open-ended questions, which can swing open the door to deeper conversation. These questions also signal, in a light and non-confrontational way, that you care about your family member and are ready to listen to them.

If you're a parent concerned about your child's mental well-being, starting with a question — rather than approaching them with your own concerns and perspective — allows your child space to reflect and share on their own terms.

The following is a guide to help open-up the conversation about mental health with those you love. Whether the discussion is with your child, spouse, sibling, parent, or close friend— this guide can be a roadmap for creating a positive routine of “checking in”.

Starting Simple

“How have you been feeling lately?”

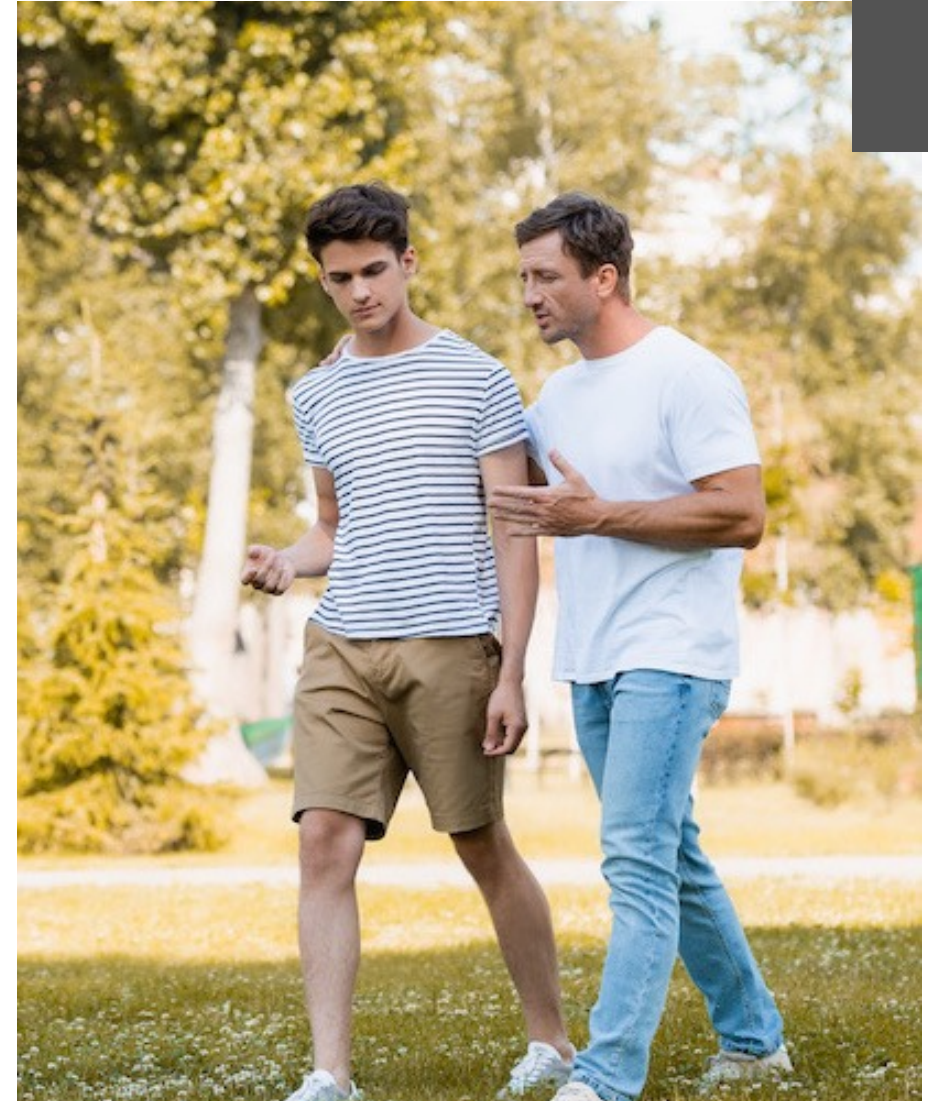
or

“How are you, really?”

Sometimes, it's the simplest questions that open up space for the most in-depth, important conversations and realizations. Asking your family member how they're feeling can seem quite ordinary or trivial — but with some intention, the question can go a long way.

So many of us respond to a general, “How are you?” question on auto-pilot by answering, “fine” or “good”. Taking this question a step further by adding, “How are you, really?” or “How are things really going for you lately?” can shift your family member out of auto-pilot and encourage a deeper reflection.

To make the question even more meaningful, carve out some time and space to ask the question, without distractions, and demonstrate that you are truly wanting to hear your family member out.



Getting Specific

“What is something you’ve been dreading?”

or

“What’s something that you’re looking forward to right now?”

or

“What’s the best and worst part of your week?”



For some, a broad question is the best way to go about launching a conversation about mental health. But for others, more specific, pointed questions might be needed to kickstart the conversation.

When it comes to mental health, there are a multitude of different signs, symptoms and changes in one’s thoughts and behaviors that can point toward poor mental health. These can include feelings of hopelessness or anxiety, loss of motivation and inclinations to withdraw, to name a few.

Asking a family member to talk about their week invites them to discuss highs and lows they’ve been experiencing. This can help give a sense of what, if anything, has been motivating or exciting them — or stressing or angering them. Asking them something with a very tangible answer can help jumpstart the conversation and open the opportunity for follow-up questions.

Digging Deeper

“It seems you haven’t been acting like yourself lately. Has anything been weighing on you?”

If you are sensing that a loved one may be struggling with their mental health, it can be a good first step to address the apparent changes in their behavior in a way that shows you care.

Perhaps you’ve noticed changes in their routine behaviors including sleeping and eating, or changes in emotions and behaviors, such as persistent sadness or withdrawing from social life. Rather than approaching your family member in a prescriptive or confrontational way, try using language like “I’ve noticed that you…” or “It seems as though…” when talking about changes in their behavior. Ensure you are approaching them gently and without judgment. Then, allow them room to talk about how they’ve been feeling.

When someone is talking about their own mental health, listen openly. Take what they’re saying seriously, rather than downplaying or trivializing what they’re feeling with statements like “It’s just a rough patch.”

At the same time, understand that your loved ones may have boundaries. There may be things they don’t yet feel comfortable sharing, or they want to open up more slowly. Respect those boundaries as you engage in the open conversation.



Empathize

“The last few weeks/months have been quite difficult for all of us. I wonder how you’ve been holding up?”

or

“Sometimes I have good days, sometimes bad ones. We haven’t checked in lately about how we’ve been feeling. Maybe we can find some time to talk about that?”

Opening up about mental health — sometimes especially to a family member — can seem frightening and difficult for many. One way to instantly close a productive discussion about mental health is by expressing harsh judgment or invalidating someone else’s feelings.

If you are trying to initiate a conversation about mental health or check-in with a family member, you can try approaching them with “We” and “I” statements. Speaking about mental health, including with your child, doesn’t have to, and shouldn’t, be a completely one-way street.

When starting a conversation about mental health and listening to a family member talk about their own mental health, always offer empathy. Reassure the other person that you are listening, that you’re on their side, and that they’re not alone in any struggles they’re facing.

And remember: You must check in with yourself, too!



Showing Support

**“I’m here to listen if you ever want to talk about anything at all.” or
“What’s something I can do differently that would help you?” or
“Can I offer anything: time to talk, some more space, a moment to do something fun together?”**



Different people have different needs and preferences for how they best want to be supported. When it comes to mental health, there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

Ask your loved one about what they feel is the best way you can support them. It can also be useful to plan out how to connect and check in about mental health on a regular basis. Maybe it’s a routine sit-down in a comfortable and safe location, or phone call to ask about how things have been going lately. Maybe someone wants their fellow family members to learn more independently about what they are going through. Or maybe they just need reassurance that you are always there to listen, unconditionally.

Whether it’s at the start of your conversation, or at the end, always show support for the other person by giving them an opportunity to express their needs. The ability to identify one’s needs and effectively communicate them to another person is an invaluable tool that can be modeled through this process.

Finally, don’t forget to tell your loved ones how much you love and care about them. Knowing that family members have their back can make a huge difference.

If you need to seek more help, We're here!



Talking about mental health can be difficult, and it's impossible for anyone to have all the answers. If you or a loved one is seeking more support, it can be helpful to speak to a therapist.

At Georgetown Psychology, we have a team of experienced therapists with diverse specialties and approaches to serve the needs of our clients.

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