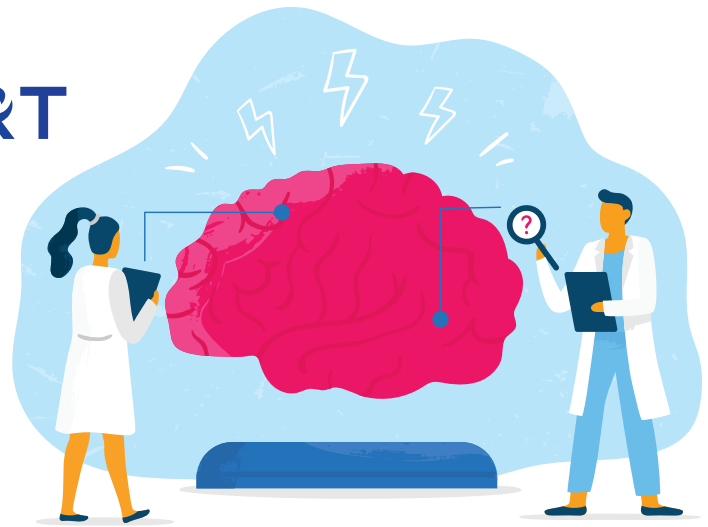


PEER SUPPORT BASICS

There is no such thing as a foolproof playbook for supporting your friends and colleagues through a crisis, but these tips can help.



CHECK ON YOURSELF FIRST.

Before starting a conversation with someone who may be struggling, do a quick assessment of your own feelings first. Are you in a good place to talk about tough topics?

CONTEXT MATTERS.

Consider how your relationship dynamic might affect how your questions are perceived. It's often easier to be vulnerable with peers who are on equal footing. Be cognizant of the timing and tone when you start to ask questions – there isn't always a "right time" to approach these conversations, but there is often a wrong time.

LEARN TO DETECT DISTRESS.

- Have you noticed a change in demeanor and appearance?
- Are you aware of any personal circumstances – family, financial, career – that could be causing them additional worry?
- Take notice of comments that indicate that person is having more than a bad day:
 - Feeling hopeless or helpless
 - Describing themselves as a burden
 - Admitting to suicidal feelings
 - Passive death statements
(ie: "It would be better if I went to bed and never woke up.")



PEER SUPPORT PROJECT

ASK CONSIDERATE QUESTIONS.

Sometimes the hardest part is knowing how to start the conversation.

- Share your own struggles first so they don't feel alone.
 - *"I'm not getting much sleep these days. How are you holding up?"*
- Try to ask open ended questions.
 - *"How is your week going?"*
 - *"I'm wondering how you are."*
- And if you know specifics, mention them:
 - *"How are your kids handling the changes?"*
 - *"How did that appointment go?"*



BE A GREAT LISTENER.

It takes conscious effort to become a person who *really* listens.

DO:

- Give the person your full attention
- Encourage and empathize with nonverbal cues like nodding
- Stay calm even if the person's words surprise you

DON'T:

- Interrupt
- Project your feelings into the situation
- Become preoccupied with your own response
- Try to solve the problem

FOLLOW UP.

Keep the conversation going after the initial discussion, making a point to follow up a few days later after you've both had time to process the conversation. Many who work in the medical field are accustomed to hiding their emotions, but empathy and kindness can make all the difference when supporting your peers.

SOURCES

1. "How to Ask if Everything Is OK When It's Clearly Not" *The New York Times* July 28, 2020
2. "Who's got your back? Psychological Awareness & Team Support," ACEP webinar, June 2020, acep.org/covid19-peer-support



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