

Supporting the Mental Health of Those Around You

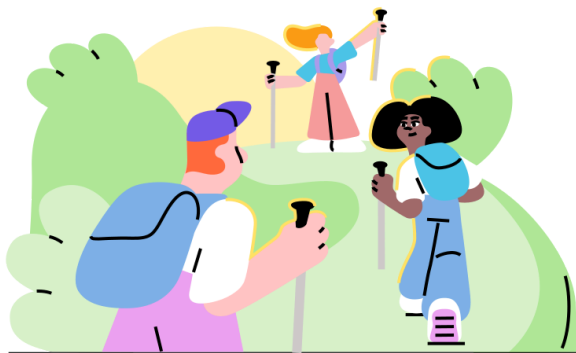


By: Zoe Waterhouse-Bushnell

It can be difficult to know how to support someone who's struggling with their mental health. This can be made even harder for several reasons, including if:

- The person is someone close to you,
- Conversations about mental health in your community are stigmatised or infrequent,
- You're worried about doing the wrong thing, or
- You've never supported someone with their mental health before.

It's normal to be worried about doing or saying the wrong thing. Importantly, there's no single right way to support someone with their mental health. Here are some of things that I've found helpful as someone who has supported people around me, including friends, family and in a professional role as a peer worker, and as someone who has received support when I've struggled with my mental health.



Navigating How to Offer Support

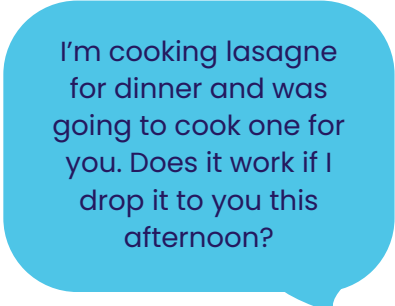
Asking for help isn't as easy as "just reaching out", and even when you do reach out, how are you supposed to know what help to ask for? This is a common and very valid experience. On the other hand, if you're someone trying to offer

support, this can sometimes make it difficult (not that it's anyone's fault!) to know when or how to offer help. The good thing is there are lots of ways to offer support.

I mentioned that it can be difficult to know how to support someone if you've never done it before; however, it's likely that you have supported someone's mental health and just didn't realise it. Support can take any forms and it can be helpful (for you and the other person) to provide suggestions about what type of support you could offer. For example, messaging someone and saying:



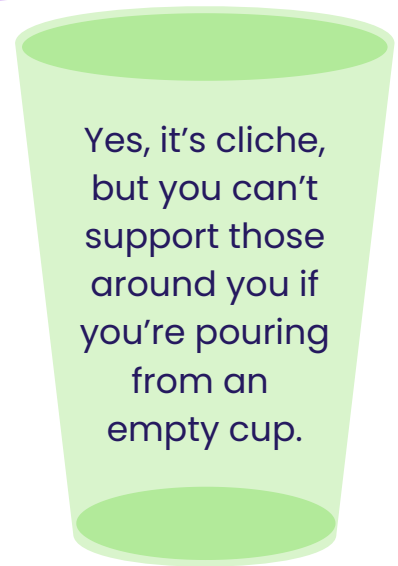
You can also offer support without it specifically being about the person's mental health.



Continued

I've also learnt that it's important to listen to people's feedback about the support I'm offering to ensure it's genuinely helpful. Not everyone will find the same kind of support helpful and that's ok!

It's also normal and valid to find it difficult to support someone with their mental health.



Practical Suggestions

- **Cooking meals**
- Helping complete **household chores** (eg. laundry, emptying bins, washing up)
- Offering to **pick the person up** if you're going out, so they can go with you
- **Grocery shopping** with them or dropping round some grocery staples
- Helping make a **weekly plan** or **list of daily non-negotiables** (These can also be called ADLs (Activities of Daily Living), & describe tasks that help people maintain health, independence & self-care like bathing, teeth brushing & eating.)
- **'Body doubling'** involves completing a task in the presence (in person or virtually/remotely) of someone else to help improve focus and motivation. (eg. FaceTiming and brushing your teeth together)

Compassionate Accountability

Compassionate accountability can be great. This doesn't mean getting the person "in trouble" if they don't do something they said they would. It's about creating a supportive, non-judgemental space to offer encouragement and remind them that you'll check in to see how they're going later because you care about them. This is a great way to support someone if you don't live nearby, are busy, or have reduced capacity yourself.



I hope some of these suggestions are helpful, or at a minimum, validate that it's difficult to navigate supporting the mental health of those around you (and yourself).

You're doing a really great job!

Signing off to go brush my teeth (ticking off those ADLs!),

Zoe 😊