

Help for a Friend **A Fact Sheet To Share**

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It can be very uncomfortable to approach and talk to someone about a problem. Sometimes we might feel nervous about acting on our concerns for others because we don't want to offend someone or intrude in their lives. People are surprised, however, to find that their concern is usually appreciated when it is expressed in a respectful way. Trust your intuition if you think there is a problem, and know that your compassion and efforts may prevent the unnecessary suffering or institutionalization of an older friend who is having trouble. Remember that most problems don't happen overnight – they usually have a slow progression that can be missed even by persons closest to the individual. Your concern might bring important insight and may prompt the action to protect your friend from harm.

People generally keep their same personality and behavioral traits throughout their lives. Marked personality changes are not a normal part of aging and are likely to be indicative of a problem. Because there are so many things that can cause health, mood, behavior and attitude changes in later life, it is important not to play the role of “Doctor” or try to figure it all out. The best you can do is note changes and symptoms you think are problematic and then speak with your friend or make a helpful connection with a community service or care provider

Tips for talking with a person who you think needs help:

- Avoid blaming language and tone
- Be a good listener, express appreciation for their feelings
- Educate and dispel myths, tell them what you know or have learned about symptoms or problems
- Instill hope, offer support and resources, explore their resources – whom do they go to for help?
- Have the conversation in a calm and familiar environment where there aren't distractions and the other person feels comfortable
- Avoid having the conversation in the midst of a crisis or an argument happening – you don't want the person to feel angry or defensive

- Express appreciation for the individual's friendship and your intent to be helpful
- Avoid judgment and accusations
- Offer specific things that you've noticed that are of concern and ask if the individual has noticed any changes or problems
- Offer to assist the person as next steps are planned or made
- Reinforce that they deserve better health and joyful living
- Appreciate how difficult it might be for your friend to admit to a problem or ask for help
- Reassure your friend that he/she can trust you and call on you for help down the line
- Give your friend a list of resources for support in case they want to use them at a later time
- Never promise anything you can't deliver
- Follow up, talk to them later about the conversation and any outcomes
- Appreciate that your friend might take action without wanting to share information
- Remember that denial is a barrier to all kinds of treatment and don't take their denial personally
- Consult a professional for guidance or help if you expect that the situation is dangerous or particularly difficult
- Have a plan ready in case the person agrees and wants to seek help quickly

Conversation starters:

- "I've been worried about you lately and I feel like I want to tell you why..."
- "I've noticed..... and I'm concerned because..."
- "You know, I enjoy our friendship so much and I want to be helpful when I think there is something wrong. I'm concerned now because I think..."
- "I was talking with someone the other day and they told me about ... (offer education on the issue of concern to open the door to more conversation)."
- Sometimes it is appropriate to involve a third party; another friend, family member or professional. When talking with others try to remember these tips:

- Stick with the facts, avoid gossiping, interpreting the situation for others or passing judgment
- Offer specifics about your concerns and the problems / symptoms you've noticed
- Reflect how the current situation represents a change and state your perception of the emergence of the situation
- Inquire about next steps and appropriate interventions that you or others might need to take

Older adults have the highest rate of suicide of any other population and talk about wanting to die such as "*There's no use.*" "*I'm no good to anyone.*" "*I'd rather be dead.*" "*I'm just a burden.*" "*Why go on like this?*" Should prompt immediate attention. Do not be afraid to ask someone if they think of killing themselves – you will not put the idea into their head or make it happen. If someone confirms that they think about suicide and especially if they appear to have a plan or the means to carry out a plan, you should not leave them alone and get help as soon as possible.