



UPLIFTING NEWS

How to approach someone who you think or know is being affected by poor mental health

September 10th, 2018 - September 2018 TMR Digital Support Group

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What are TMR Digital Support Groups? The MindReset (TMR) Community is pleased to offer digital support groups as a medium for bringing individuals together in a safe space for discussion and social support. By conducting these groups through a digital platform, potential barriers created by geography and inability to access human resources are reduced. These groups are facilitated to ensure participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts in a growth-oriented environment. Attendees are able to engage actively or passively with no requirement for attendees to reveal their faces or to speak. The goals of these discussions are for participants to leave with useful suggestions or actions they can take to improve their own lives and/or the people they care about.

The September support group focused primarily on how to initiate a conversation with someone about their mental health. The group started with individuals rating where they perceived their mental health status to be on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 representing the most optimal mental health level. Then attendees shared their participation levels for the day, as well as topics they were interested in discussing. The following scenarios were identified as topic areas about which attendees wanted to learn more:

- How to approach a best friend about mental health.
- How to be healthy and supportive of a friend hospitalized for a suicide attempt when a romantic history exists and the friend is not telling anyone else.
- How to be motivated when stressed out and feeling apathetic.
- How to support a partner who had a traumatic brain injury (TBI) when both supporter and the individual with TBI feel the health system has failed them.

Given the similarities between the first two scenarios, support for a friend with mental health became the primary focus of discussion. The attendees wanting to learn more about brain injury support systems were linked to resources through The MindReset network, including an invitation to a live support group, upcoming trainings, and direct access to peers with brain injury.



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Participants chimed in with their own personal experiences and advice about what to do and what not to do when talking about mental health.

Don't do this!	Instead, try this!
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Jump right in and help. “They may lash out because [mental health] is a sensitive topic.”2. Look for a solution. “Sometimes as a male, it seems as though we are always trying to find a solution when there isn’t always one.”3. Ask close-ended questions. “Try not to ask ‘Is everything alright?’ When the question can simply be answered with ‘yes’ or ‘no’, then that might be the end of the conversation.”4. Act detached. “Feeling alone and like no one had my back didn’t make me want to reach out to anyone or talk about what I was going through.”5. Isolate. “I remember it being so much harder before I learned how to ask for help. It was so hard.”6. Nothing. “My apathy is consuming...I waste time, feel frozen, feel stuck...it’s easy for me to put into words because it is what is happening to me right now.”	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. LISTEN! “Approach with patience and understanding. Often people just want to be heard.”2. Ask about what makes them feel hesitant about talking about mental health. One participant felt like this was well received by his male friends.3. Ask an open ended question: “I may be perceiving this wrong, but it seems as though your mood is a bit low. I really care about you. How are you feeling?”4. Be affirming. “You know it’s going to be okay, even if they don’t know it’s going to be okay...just [telling someone else] it’s going to be okay has been helpful.”5. Offer support. “It was comforting when someone shared with me their experience. Even though it may not have been the exact same, it made me feel less alone.”6. Offer advice if it is desired. Always be supportive regardless of whether advice is wanted.<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ “Sometimes I think about what boosts my morale”,→ “Sometimes I can be [in a bad mood for a] week, then a song will come on, or I’ll see a cool post, and I’ll think, ‘I can get back on the horse’”,→ “I’ll think, ‘The world is bigger than I thought’”,→ “I might ask, ‘Where do you want to see yourself? Where do you want to orient yourself?’ It’s not the end all be all.”



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After these exploratory discussions, individuals who posed their scenarios felt like the support group was very informative and that there was at least some piece of advice they could use. One first time participant stated, “Wow, it was actually great! There was a lot of uplifting conversation!”

REFLECTION: Some considerations or questions that one might ask and answer before approaching someone struggling with their mental health:

1. What is your relationship to the person you may be approaching?
 - a. Are you close?
 - b. Have you built trust?
 - c. Have there been communication issues in the past?
2. How comfortable are you with initiating a conversation?
 - a. Would knowing what to do make you feel more comfortable or confident with starting a conversation? What skills might you use during your conversation?
 - i. Active listening!
 - ii. Connecting, while focusing your attention on them.
 - iii. Accepting.
 - iv. Being present, yet being able to express availability within means.
 - v. Understanding.
 - vi. Caring for their safety, functioning, and health.
 - vii. Supporting.
3. How comfortable do you believe they will be with discussing mental health?
 - a. What would make them feel more comfortable? Location? Sensory item?
4. What would be the ideal outcome of your conversation?
 - a. From your perspective?
 - b. From their perspective? [Practice being in others' shoes].

The MindReset Community encourages others to join these digital support groups, typically hosted every first or second Monday of the month. Upcoming support groups can be found on the [Events page](#). Interested individuals are also able to register [HERE](#). We hope to see you then!

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