

Tips to talk about mental health*

YES, YOU CAN TALK ABOUT IT

You have an opportunity to improve your team's communication and wellness. One in five Americans report living with a behavioral health condition such as depression, anxiety, or addiction. The rest of us are impacted through friends, family, and coworkers.

Stigma causes many people to avoid getting effective behavioral health treatment. By enabling more open dialogue, you can help bring down this common barrier to living and working well.

Below are some practical tips that can help your team talk about mental health more often and more easily.

Conversation Do's

- Talk in your normal voice and be yourself. There is no need to turn on your "sad voice" to reach your friend, family member, or coworker.
- Ask if and how you can help them, and listen thoughtfully. Only offer help that is practical for you. It's better to say no than to make an offer you won't keep.
- Invite them to contribute to your life. People want to feel included, so ask them to do normal, everyday stuff—things you'd ask somebody who isn't experiencing a mental health condition.

Conversation Don'ts

- Avoid dismissive phrases such as "get over it" and "snap out of it." They've already tried that! Telling them to make themselves feel better will likely make them pull away rather than talk.
- Don't try to "fix" them unless they ask for help. Just listen and try to understand their experience. Ask questions if you want to. Your time and caring are worth a lot.
- Don't take it personally if you are met with evasive or negative responses. Respond positively to rejection instead of complaining that they failed to meet your expectation.

*Tips provided by Dr. Shawn West, Premera Blue Cross medical director, and Bill Bernat, TED speaker and mental health awareness advocate. Find out more by watching the [full video segment](#) that was filmed on "New Day Northwest," a talk program on KING-5 TV in Seattle.