



# Friends and family

# Friends and family

Loneliness can have an impact on our mental health and has been widely seen as an impact of the pandemic. We can feel lonely, even if we physically have others around us. Remember that even if there aren't people close to us that we feel we can talk to, there is always someone you can talk to via a helpline such as the Samaritans.

It may be that someone around us is struggling with how they're feeling, or may not be feeling themselves and we can be an ear to listen for them. Sometimes it can be difficult for people to share how they're feeling, so just being there is often the most powerful thing that we can do. Even if that involves sitting in silence, they know that we're there.

It can be helpful to ask twice to see how someone is doing. We're all quite guilty of using 'hi how are you doing' as a greeting, and then we move on. Within that there is no capacity for someone to say 'actually I'm not okay and can we talk about it'. So if you have a feeling someone isn't feeling themselves, ask twice, 'no really, how are you at the minute' 'how are things'. This gives someone the green light, that we're there, we've got time, and we care.

And when they answer, if they start to open up about how they feel, listen. Really listen to what they are saying. Sometimes our own agendas, thoughts and worries take over, which means we don't actively listen in that moment to what someone is sharing with us.

As a society we're all fantastic problem solvers, and sometimes we jump into 'fixing it' mode as we want to support and help that person. But often fixing it is out of our remit, and all we can do is be there and listen. You don't have to have a solution, you don't have to have a fix or a great idea, just be there, allow them the space to share. If you don't know what to say a helpful phrase can be 'I'm so sorry things are so difficult, thank you for telling me.'

We spoke about the barrier and stigma around reaching out for professional support earlier this week but speaking to someone about the professional support around them too may be helpful. They may not know this support is available. By speaking with you about it may make them feel more confident to reach out for this support, you could even make the phone call together.

If you are a carer for someone who is struggling with their mental health it is also important that you are looking after yourself too. There are some great resources on the carers hub of the Rethink Mental Illness website.

We all have mental health and can all benefit from an ear to listen from time to time. Try reaching out today to someone around you and ask how they are, not once, but twice.

