

CHANGES MODULE 15:

Supporting others



If you're at a support group, the chances are you benefit from being with others, gaining and giving support. Sometimes supporting others can really boost our self-worth and offer connection; but sometimes we can feel scared of saying the wrong thing. Moreover, if we give too much, we can drain ourselves.

There are four main things to remember:

1. ASK

If you're concerned about somebody, **ask** them how they're doing. You might also tell them that you've noticed they seem different.

It's common to worry that by asking someone we might make it worse for them, but this is very rarely true. Most people will feel seen and cared for when asked how they are. And if they don't want to talk, they will brush you off.

Before you ask them though, **make sure you have the time, ability and space to listen!** Rushing off might be more damaging than saying nothing. If you do discover time is tight, you could offer them another time to talk that might be in a calmer, safer or more open environment.

2. LISTEN

There are different kinds of listening. When someone needs support, try to listen without interrupting, and try to stop yourself from making assumptions about the problem (or comparisons to your own life). It's easy to do, but everybody's

experience is uniquely theirs, even if it feels very similar to our own.

Be with them, be honest and open, try not to crowd them, rush them or give them unnecessary physical contact.

Don't try to fix it. When we jump into problem-solving mode it can give the impression that we want the problem to go away quickly, that we are not open to listening to how they feel, and that we are uncomfortable with their distress. Offer options or possible solutions cautiously and only if you think this is what the person is looking for.

3. ACTION

Sometimes **just listening is enough action**: being heard and not judged is powerful. But some people prefer more action and there may be small things you can do to help them.

Sometimes we can show people we care with our actions. Small things like sending a check-in text at the weekend or cooking them their

favourite meal can be really meaningful.

We can also support someone else in doing things themselves to help them feel better. Showing someone a website for a hobby they'd like to start, or inviting them out for a walk can be simple ways to help someone take action.

If you feel particularly concerned by something they have shared (e.g. suicidal thoughts, delusions, self-harm, aggression etc), you could look for more professional support with them. Perhaps you could offer to be with them while they make the call to their GP or crisis team.

4. COMMUNITY

Nobody should have to face mental distress on their own. Find out what sort of **support network** they have already. Sometimes just asking "who do you have in your life?" can help remind them of who they can lean on.

If they are quite isolated, you might think about suggesting groups like Changes or other places for social connection (such as volunteering, choirs, clubs, walking groups).

Offer only the amount of support that you can realistically manage and monitor how you feel in yourself. Sometimes supporting others can leave us feeling helpless, frustrated or drained. Your own resilience is important here and you should think about who **your community** is too.

You cannot pour from an empty cup, so you need to continue to boost yourself with your own support network, in order to be there for others.

As someone who has struggled with mental distress, you may find others feel comfortable to reach out to you because they know they won't be judged. Realising this can help us to see our own struggles in a new light. It can help us see our lived experience as valuable, and their confiding in us as a privilege.

Further resources:

- For information on support services as well as activities, Bristol Mind have a signposting number: 0117 980 0370 (open 9.30am-3.30pm)
- If you are finding the weight of responsibility too much when caring for someone else, The Samaritans are happy to listen: 116 123 (free)
- "Male Mental Health Undermined by Friends' 'Desire To Advise'" Article in Mental Health Today: <https://bit.ly/33Vw6ls>