



5.1 Are You Okay?

Suggested Grade Level: 9-12

Time: 30-45 Minutes

Subject Area: Mental Health, Support Resources

Overview:

“Are You Okay?” discusses how to talk about mental health and how to help out friends in need.

Goals:

- Recognize signs friends are not doing well
- Feel comfortable engaging friends in conversations about mental health
- Develop skills for talking about mental health

Materials:

- None

Procedure:

Step One:

Discuss the group’s boundaries and topics that people would rather not have discussed at length or in depth in this group such as self harm or suicide

Step Two:

Use provided discussion questions to begin a conversation

Step Three:

When relevant hand out or pass around the advice for talking to struggling friends. (The open spaces are for the group to include their own advice.)

Step Four:

Offer the opportunity for people to role play out scenarios and difficult conversations. Example scenarios are listed after the discussion questions.

Discussion Questions

- Is there a time you helped someone or were helped through a hard time? (Please protect that person's anonymity) What was it like helping them? Did you struggle to know what to say?
- When you're upset, hurting, anxious, etc how have your friends helped? What did they say? How did they say it?
- Are there things you should avoid saying at all costs? Why?
- If someone is upset after a conversation do you reach out to them? How do you reach out?
- Are there limits to what you would do for your friends? How do you establish your limits of what you would do for them?

Roleplay Scenarios

- Brook was recently broken up with and hasn't been coming to GSA
- Dana failed their final and has seemed distant since then
- Kelly has been fighting with a mutual friend and has stopped coming to mutual get togethers

Guide to asking a friend if they are okay

Having the chat

- Pick somewhere comfortable and private, such as your house.
- Try to remove any distractions before you start
- Making eye contact is a good way to get their attention.
- Listen carefully and intentionally
- Try and use relaxed body language. Not crossing your arms and legs, and facing your friend square on shows them you really care.
- Don't push it
- Let them know it is okay if they are not ready or able to talk about it.
- Be patient if they need to think over your offer to talk.

Some things to consider

If you've got some idea of what's wrong, it's easier to get the conversation flowing.

They might be feeling down because they're:

- going through something stressful
- experiencing grief or loss
- hanging around people who are going through tough times
- arguing with someone
- having problems at school//work
- experiencing big life changes, such as moving
- caring for someone who is unwell
- bored
- being treated for a medical condition or a chronic illness
- not sleeping well

Questions to ask

It's up to your friend to tell you what's going on - not for you to make suggestions. Some of the questions you could ask to encourage them to open up are:

- 'Hey, how have you been lately? What's been happening?'
- 'You haven't seemed yourself lately. Is there something you'd like to talk about?'
- 'What's going on for you at the moment?'
- 'How are you doing? Anything you want to chat about?'

How to Respond

- Listen to what they have to say.
- Ask them why they may be feeling that way.
- Make it very clear that you're there for them.
- Be non-judgemental and supportive.
- Look after yourself

- Helping someone may require boundaries. For example, you might decide that you're not prepared to miss school because of them, or that you won't take phone calls after midnight. This is okay, your boundaries are essential to your own health.

Getting help

If your friend has been going through a rough patch for a long time, it's a good idea to have a chat with them about seeking professional help:

- Let them know that you're willing to help them figure out who to talk to (if you're comfortable doing so)
- Stay in contact, to let them know you haven't forgotten them.
- Offer to accompany them to any appointment.
- Encourage them to seek professional help and - if you're worried about their safety - let someone know, even if they've asked you not to.

**Advice retooled from Reach Out at <https://au.reachout.com/articles/how-to-ask-a-friend-if-theyre-ok>*