

R
U
OK?
—



**what
to say
next?**

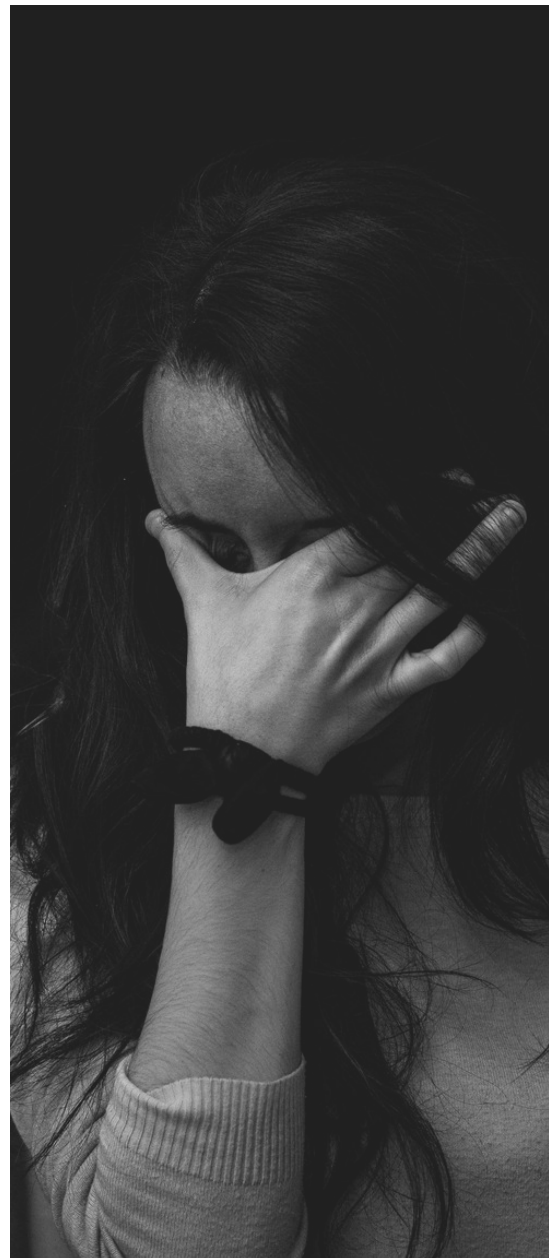
WHAT NEXT???

So, you have asked your friend “R U OK?” and they have said, “no, not really.” What do you do now?

Do you awkwardly back out of the conversation or brush over it as though you didn’t hear them?

You actually do care about them, which is why you asked in the first place, but perhaps you don’t know how to listen in a way that is going to help them feel heard. Or perhaps you feel like you won’t have any answers for them, no solutions to their problems.

In the following pages of this eBook, you will find that listening doesn’t have to be difficult and that solving problems is not the aim of the game.



LISTEN WITH AN OPEN HEART

"People start to heal the moment they feel heard"

Cheryl Richardson.



Listening is easier said than done. Have you heard the saying “people don’t really listen, they just wait for their turn to talk”? This is true all too often. However, when someone is hurting or suffering from emotional pain, what they really need is to be heard. They need someone to listen to them and understand things from their perspective. This can provide the basis from which they can start to heal.

Consider it from this perspective. Remember back to being a kid? When you were hurt or upset you might have gone to your parents for comfort. They might not have been able to do anything about your problems but for them to just be there with you, understanding your problems from your perspective made you feel good because knowing that someone else in the world gets you, understands you, and knows you, validates you as a person, and this feels comforting. As adults, we seek out this comfort with parents, family, and friends. So, sitting and really trying to understand what someone is telling you, from their position, as though you were in their shoes, is really important.

REFLECT

Often we think we have understood what someone is saying without really knowing for certain whether the way we understand it is 'spot on' or not. For this reason, it is really important to check-in and make sure that we really do get it. Simply said, ask the person by reflecting back to them in your own words what they have said. For example, say "So what you're saying is... (insert your understanding of their problem)". They will likely tell you whether or not you have it right. If you don't have it right then ask them to clarify to make sure you understand them correctly or as best as you can.



VALIDATE



This step is all about validating someone else's experience by telling them that what they are saying makes sense to you. You can simply say, "I can understand that" or "That makes sense to me because..."

However, please note that through validation you do not necessarily have to agree or disagree with them. Validation is simply acknowledging that from their perspective, you understand how they see it.

EMPATHISE

Empathy is immensely valuable in a relationship. If you are not sure what empathy is, or what it means to empathise, it is simply to put yourself in someone else's shoes and understand how they feel, from their perspective. So, once you have taken a moment to listen and have checked (reflected) with them that you have the correct understanding of what they are saying, and once you have given some validation for their experience, pause for a moment and take it all in. Really try to put yourself in their shoes and understand how this problem or situation would make them feel, and then say it back to them. For example, you might say "That must make you feel really upset (or insert other emotion here)". This will really hammer home that you have listened to them and understood what they are saying and how they are feeling.



THINGS TO AVOID



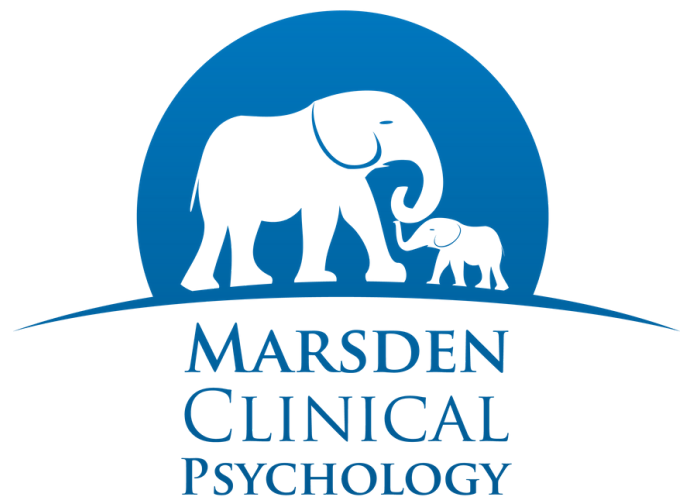
Avoid trying to solve problems, particularly early on in the conversation. This is a very common mistake and leads to the other person feeling invalidated and emotionally dismissed. It's natural to want to help others and solving problems is a practical way that we can help (it's often what we do with ourselves). However, when someone speaks it is hearing the problem and connecting with them on an emotional level that can lead to healing.

That's not to say that problem solving is pointless, it can certainly be helpful at times. However, listening, reflecting, validating and empathising should be the first priority.

TAKING FURTHER ACTION

If, after you have followed the steps of listening, reflecting, validating, and empathising, your friend is in a position to do something about their current difficulties, it might be helpful to encourage them to seek professional help. This can be in many different forms. If they do not already have a psychologist or other mental health professional that they see, it might be worth asking them if they would like some help to find someone or make that first appointment. Sometimes speaking with a GP can be a good first step to take because a GP can then make an appropriate referral for professional help.

If the person you are speaking with discloses that they have been suicidal, it is very important that you ensure they are connected with the right mental health services. Again, doctors are a good first port of call but if the situation is urgent, do not hesitate to call emergency (“000”) or take them to accident and emergency at the nearest hospital.



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EXAMPLE CONVERSATION

Me: Hey Sarah, R U OK?

Sarah: You know, I'm not quite sure...

Me: What do you mean?

Sarah: Umm.. (awkward silence).

Me: It's alright, talk to me, I'm here to listen. I'm your friend, I won't judge. It's OK...

Sarah: Well, I guess I have been feeling really down lately and I am not sure why.

Me: That really sucks Sarah, I'm sorry to hear that mate. What's been getting you down?

Sarah: I don't know. Well, that's not exactly true, I have a bit of an idea. I just feel like I'm a bit worthless and I don't have anyone around me that loves me. I don't feel close to anyone, except you of course. But otherwise, I feel like as hard as I try I just can't seem to connect with people and it's been making me think that it's because I'm not a lovable person, or there is something wrong with me, you know?



Ask R U OK?

CONVERSATION CONTINUED..

Me: (reflection) So what you're saying is that you haven't been feeling close or connected with people lately and you are blaming yourself, thinking that it's because no one could possibly love you, that there is something inherently wrong with you?

Sarah: Yeah, that's pretty much it.

Me: (validation) I can understand how you would think that way when you feel disconnected from everyone.

Me: (empathy) I'm really sorry you feel that way. That must make you feel really sad and lonely.

Sarah: Yeah, it has been. Thanks for listening, it just feels good to be heard, you know?

Me: Yeah, I do.

