

# TIP SHEET #5

## MENTAL HEALTH CONVERSATIONS WHAT IFS

**During a conversation with someone about mental health issues, difficult moments can sometimes occur. In these circumstances, it is not always easy to know the most helpful and constructive way to respond.**

Tip Sheet 5 “Mental Health Conversation What Ifs” shares some of the most common difficult moments that can sometimes occur when having a mental health conversation, and some tips on how to best deal with them.

### **What should I do if the person doesn't want to talk to me?**

Just because you reach out to someone, it doesn't mean your support is wanted. If this happens, just let them know you don't want to intrude on their personal life – only that you want to encourage them to seek support if they need it. You may provide information to link them to EAP, TIACS or other support services available.

### **How should I respond if someone becomes upset?**

Talking about mental health conditions can be very distressing. If the person you are talking with becomes sad or angry, it is best to acknowledge the emotion as you see it and ask how the person would like to proceed. They may feel embarrassed for getting emotional or just feel completely overwhelmed. For example, some alone time, having a glass of water, or taking some deep breaths can help. It is okay if someone is upset. Take some time and proceed with any next steps when things have become a little calmer.

### **What is the best way to handle someone disclosing they are suicidal?**

Remain calm and explore the individual's suicide intention directly and non-judgmentally. Listen and take all the time it needs. Gain a commitment from them to seek support and provide the details to link them to appropriate services. Always follow-up, or ensure someone follows-up to check on their welfare in the days following the conversation.

### **If you feel someone is of an imminent threat to themselves because a clear intent and plan have been indicated, call Emergency Services on 000.**

Finally, ensure you look after yourself and debrief with someone afterwards.

### **I've tried to reach out to someone but they have dismissed my concern and said they are fine.**

Respond by acknowledging that it is great to hear they are doing fine and that you don't mean to intrude on their personal life at all. Respectfully let the person know that if that changes, you are available to provide them with information about your organisation's EAP, TIACS and other relevant support services if ever needed.

### What if the person I'm talking to won't get help or accept the support offered?

Whilst you can encourage someone to get help and direct them to resources, it is always an individual's choice as to the extent they utilise that support. If a person does not want to engage in any type of support it can be helpful to say:

*"Ok, I appreciate that you don't want this help right now. Keep in mind that this support is here for you whenever you are ready."*

### What if I can't stop worrying about someone who I think might need some mental health support?

Issues around mental health conditions can be confronting or distressing. It is normal to feel concerned or to worry about someone, particularly if you are not sure of their state of mind.

Some strategies that you may find helpful are:

- 1 Talk it over with a trusted leader or peer (in a manner that protects the privacy of the person).
- 2 Check-in with the person to reassure yourself that they are okay (remember to not overwhelm or intrude on the person though – it can feel demeaning and over-involved if you are checking in when it is not wanted).
- 3 Remind yourself that you have done everything you can to provide support. Remember that you can't control other people's choices.
- 4 Seek confidential EAP support for yourself if available, or alternatively contact TIACS.

### What if the person feels embarrassed after talking about their mental health?

It takes great courage and vulnerability to share that you are experiencing a mental health condition. Someone may feel embarrassed, regretful, exposed, unsure, and vulnerable after making such a disclosure. If this happens it can be helpful to:

- 1 Provide feedback that you appreciate this is a difficult conversation for them to have and that you respect their courage to share.
- 2 Reassure the person that their privacy will be respected by you.
- 3 Reinforce this privacy through your language and behaviour in subsequent interactions with them.

If you or someone you know needs help contact **TIACS** on 0488 846 988 or your organisation's Employee Assistance Program (EAP), your GP or call: **LifeLine** on 13 11 14, **Kids Helpline** on 1800 551 800, **MensLine Australia** on 1300 789 978 or the **Suicide Call Back Service** on 1300 659 467.