Supporting someone who is struggling

You can offer care without having all the answers

It can be hard to know what to say when someone matters to you. A patient conversation or a small practical offer can be a place to start. You are not expected to diagnose them or put everything right. [1, 2]
This sheet includes words you can borrow, because talking with someone you trust, or with a professional, can make difficult things feel more manageable.

1 Open the door gently

Choose a private, comfortable moment. Try: 'I've been wondering how things are for you. Would you like to talk, have some company, or leave it for another time?' If they are not ready, let them know they can come back to you. [1, 2]

2 Listen before looking for answers

Give them time and let pauses happen. Try: 'Which part has been hardest?' Check your understanding: 'Have I understood that correctly?' Avoid comparisons, quick diagnoses or pressure to be positive. Ask before giving advice. [2, 3]

3 Make one specific offer

Offer something you can realistically do: bring a meal, sit with them during a call, or go with them to an appointment if they want. Ask what would be useful rather than taking over. [1]

Words you can adapt

Would listening help most, or would you like us to think about one practical next step together?

One offer I could make, with their agreement

4 Agree what happens next

You might ask: 'Would a check-in tomorrow suit you?' Be clear about when you can be available. Encourage other sources of support so neither of you has to carry this alone. [1, 4]

A next contact or check-in we could agree

Keep their story private. If you are worried about their safety, use the guidance overleaf; do not wait for a planned check-in in an emergency.

© 2026 Dr Jonathan Haverkampf

jonathanhaverkampf.com

General information and support for adults. Not a substitute for professional assessment, advice, treatment or emergency care. Immediate danger or unable to stay safe? Call 112 or 999 (Ireland, UK), 911 (US, Canada), 000 (Australia) or your local emergency number. Free to print and share blank copies. Keep personal notes private. Full disclaimer: jonathanhaverkampf.com/disclaimer

When more help is needed

Take their safety seriously and include your own wellbeing

Ask clearly if you are worried about suicide

You can ask: 'Have you been thinking about suicide?' Asking directly does not put the idea into someone's head. Listen calmly and take what they say seriously. You do not have to assess or manage the risk alone. [4]

Act on immediate danger

If someone may act on suicidal thoughts now, has seriously harmed themselves, or cannot stay safe, call 112 or 999 in Ireland; elsewhere call local emergency services. Stay with them if it is safe, or get someone safe to be with them while help comes. Follow the emergency operator's advice. Do not put yourself in danger. [5, 6]

Bring in professional support

Suicidal thoughts still deserve prompt professional help when danger is not immediate. Contact a GP (family doctor), an out-of-hours doctor or their mental health team together if possible. Severe deterioration, new voices or unusual beliefs also need assessment. Do not promise secrecy about a serious safety concern. A calm conversation alone is not proof that the risk has passed. [4, 6]

You need support too

You can care and still need rest, boundaries and help. Try: 'I can talk until eight. Who else could you contact afterwards?' If you feel threatened, get to safety and seek help. [1, 4]

Listening support, day or night

Ireland: Samaritans 116 123, or text HELLO to 50808. UK: Samaritans 116 123. US and Canada: call or text 988. Australia: Lifeline 13 11 14. Elsewhere: findahelpline.com lists free helplines by country. You can reach out if worried about someone else, too. These do not replace emergency care. [6]

Sources and further reading

These sources inform the guidance; this is not a substitute for suicide-prevention training or professional assessment.

1. NHS - Helping others with mental health problems (www.nhs.uk)
2. HSE - What to say in a tough time (www2.hse.ie)
3. HSE - Tips on being a good listener (www2.hse.ie)
4. HSE - Supporting someone who may be suicidal (www2.hse.ie)
5. Samaritans - After calling an ambulance (www.samaritans.org)
6. HSE - Get urgent help for a mental health crisis (www2.hse.ie)

Sources checked 2 October 2026. The organisations cited have not endorsed this resource. Support lines checked 25 October 2026.

More free information and support routes

More support for people who care for others

Scan for Find Help, or visit jonathanhaverkampf.com and choose Find Help.

© 2026 Dr Jonathan Haverkampf

jonathanhaverkampf.com

General information and support for adults. Not a substitute for professional assessment, advice, treatment or emergency care. Immediate danger or unable to stay safe? Call 112 or 999 (Ireland, UK), 911 (US, Canada), 000 (Australia) or your local emergency number. Free to print and share blank copies. Keep personal notes private. Full disclaimer: jonathanhaverkampf.com/disclaimer