

# HOW TO HAVE THE CONVERSATION

Your mental health matters. When we are isolated in the pain we're experiencing, it can often exacerbate it. What we hold in the dark usually stays in the dark. The weight of what we're carrying can be shared, it can be brought into the light and presence of another. An important way to do this is by starting and having an honest conversation with at least one trusted person. From there, you can continue to build your trusted circle of people to confide in and lean on (and vice versa). This worksheet will help you walk through some important steps in preparing for that conversation, selecting the right person to share with, and breaking down the experience.

## ★ PREPARATION FOR THE CONVERSATION:

Take some time to reflect on your feelings and experiences before the conversation. Jot down some key points or concerns you want to mention. Here are some prompts to help you get started:

- *What is concerning to me right now?*
- *What feels heavy or scary?*
- *Do I feel alone or isolated in my pain or struggle? Have I been carrying it alone for a while?*
- *What do I need someone to know?*
- *What am I looking for from this conversation?*

## ★ CHOOSING THE RIGHT PERSON:

There will never be a perfect conversation or perfect person but think about someone you feel comfortable and safe with or have had previous interactions with that have felt supportive. Here are some questions to help you think through who you want this person to be:

- *Who historically has been supportive and has offered empathy without judgment?*
- *Is this person a friend, family member, or mental health professional?*

## ★ SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE CONVERSATION:

It helps to have conversations like this in environments where you feel safe, and both participants can listen completely. Find a time and location where there will be fewer distractions or interruptions. It can also help if you feel comfortable letting your support person know ahead of time that you need their empathy, attention, and care even if it's at the start of the conversation so they can prepare to provide the support you are looking for. Here are some prompts to help you think through this part:

- *Where have I felt most comfortable being myself?*
- *Is there a location that's private and less distracting that's accessible to both parties?*

### ★ STARTING THE CONVERSATION:

Starting the conversation can often feel like the hardest part, but the more you practice the better it gets, and you'll find an authentic rhythm as you do it. Here are some ways to begin:

- *I am scared/nervous to share this with you, but it's really important to me.*
- *I'd like to share some recent feelings and experiences I am having with you.*

### ★ COMMUNICATING YOUR NEEDS:

After you start the conversation, it is really important to articulate your feelings, concerns, and needs honestly and clearly. Do your best to use "I" statements when expressing your feelings and experiences to avoid placing blame on others while still owning and clearly stating your personal experiences.

Examples:

- *Right now, I need someone to hear and listen to me. I just don't want to feel alone, but I don't want someone to try and fix or solve everything. What's important to me is knowing that someone else knows what I am going through.*
- *I need to share fully before hearing a response because aspects of this are hard for me to share but important for me to get out. I just need someone to listen and care for me.*

### ★ ACTIVE LISTENING:

Once you've had a chance to share what you were hoping to, your support person will likely want to respond. During this time, it's good to actively listen to what they are saying but also be actively attuned to what you need and feel. In a conversation, eye contact, engagement, and paraphrasing what's being said can be helpful. If you're having a hard time processing what they saying—even if it is helpful—consider letting them know by saying something like:

- *What you are saying is good, but right now I am just having a hard time believing it's true.*
- *I appreciate what you are saying. I am just feeling exhausted even from sharing what I did and I may need time to process or believe what you are conveying. Can we come back to this soon?*

### ★ HANDLING REACTIONS:

You will likely experience a range of reactions. If this person cares for you, you'll likely encounter empathy and concern. If this person is trying their best, but they're also in a tough spot, you may experience discomfort or insecurity. If the person is uncomfortable with the conversation, you may experience dismissiveness or aggression. Their reaction is not a reflection of you or an indicator of whether or not the conversation was worth having. You can control what you can control. Having the conversation is a massive step in and of itself. If the reaction you got feels negative, consider:

- *Trying again with someone else. Is there another person you feel safe with when it comes to talking about heavy things? There is hope and there are people out there who do want to provide care and a safe space for you.*
- *Letting this same person know that their reaction feels hurtful or makes you feel more alone. They may not be aware of the impact their reaction is having. Depending on the person, trying again might be an option.*

**★ SELF-CARE AFTER THE CONVERSATION:**

You will likely feel a level of relief regardless of the conversation's outcome. There is something about taking that first step that can make you feel really brave for trying. But even if it goes well, you may also feel sad, exhausted, and in need of some decompression and self-care time. Here are some things we recommend doing after the conversation:

- *Do something you love (even if it's just for 10 minutes)*
- *Be in a safe, supportive setting where you can be yourself*
- *Take a nap or do something restful for your brain and body*
- *When you have the energy, check in with yourself: How do I feel now? Is there still something I need?*

**★ SEEKING SUPPORT:**

Sometimes we find that having the conversation is just the first step. Whether that person can understand from their own perspective or can empathize out of care for you, our experiences are best processed within the support of others like group therapy, crisis services, or other therapeutic environments. Check in with yourself by asking:

- *Does having a support group sound helpful? Does talking to a therapist feel like it could be good for me?*
- *Do I need something more than just this initial conversation?*
- *Do I still feel like I am struggling?*

**If you need immediate, help you can text TWLOHA to 741-741 or call 988. Additional resources can be found at [twloha.com/find-help](https://twloha.com/find-help).**

**It is brave to consider, practice, and have these conversations. Discussing where we are at in our mental health is an important step towards healing and recovery.**