



Connecting to Others



We have been challenged over the last twenty months with our ability to connect to one another in varying ways. Many of us are finding ourselves in a difficult place that impacts our mental health and wellness. For many of us coming off a brutal 2020 fire season, we had the impacts of COVID-19 push us into isolation. Just when things seemed to be shifting back toward a balanced normal, we launched headfirst into a busy 2021 fire season and an uptick in COVID-19. These impacts take us away from our friends, families, and social opportunities. If we are struggling with our overall mental health, it can push us further into

isolation. We all experience challenging times that compromise our mental health. How we navigate and support each other through these moments can be crucial. Here are some tips for connecting and supporting each other during a difficult mental health event.

Active Listening

Stay in the moment with the person and allow them to open to you at their own pace. You can offer open-ended questions to help them navigate the conversation such as “how did that make you feel?” Be patient and don’t force the conversation. To learn more about improving your skills as an active listener, read the article from NY Times, How to Be a Better Listener, <https://www.nytimes.com/guides/smarterliving/be-a-better-listener>.



Active Listening Skills

How can you help?

It is common to want to jump in and provide help when we see our friends and family struggling. When someone is having a difficult time, however, it is often more helpful to ask them what they need in terms of support. Do they need someone to just listen, or do they want advice? When someone is overwhelmed, they might not know what they need, which is understandable, you can offer gentle suggestions such as asking them to join you for dinner or go for a walk. Do not assume you know what is best, just provide some suggestions and if none of those work then perhaps it will help the person identify what they feel they need in that moment.

Know When to Bridge Them to Higher Levels of Care

Sometimes an individual needs a professional clinician to help them navigate back to place of mental wellness and balance. If a friend or loved one is experiencing a mental health crisis that lasts for a longer duration (several weeks, for example), then encourage them to seek professional help. Know some resources to connect them with so they do not have to struggle with finding a clinician on top of what they are already experiencing.

For a list of resources, visit the Mental Health Subcommittee, <https://www.nwcg.gov/committees/mental-health-subcommittee>. To learn more on supporting others and connecting visit Mental Health America, <https://mhanational.org/supporting-others>.

