

Toolbox Talk for students

Asking for Help and Looking
Out for Each Other



Time: 15 minutes

Objective: To help learners feel more confident starting a supportive conversation, listening without trying to solve everything and finding appropriate help before a situation reaches crisis point.

Have you ever noticed that somebody did not seem like themselves but stayed quiet because you were worried about getting it wrong? You might wonder whether they will tell you to mind your own business or what you would say if they told you something serious. The same uncertainty can happen when we need help ourselves. Someone asks if we are alright and we automatically answer, "Yeah, I'm fine." Starting a conversation can feel difficult from either side but it does not require perfect words or professional training. It begins with noticing, asking and giving somebody time to answer.

Why It Matters

People do not always ask for help by clearly announcing that they are struggling. They may become quieter, more irritable, distracted or less interested in things they normally enjoy. Someone might miss lessons, stop replying to messages or make jokes about having a difficult time. None of these signs proves that something is wrong but a noticeable change can be a reason to check in. There are many reasons people stay quiet. They may feel embarrassed, worry about being judged or believe their problem is not serious enough. They might not know what support exists or think asking for help means they have failed to cope. Some people wait until everyday life feels unmanageable because they believe support is only for a crisis. An early conversation may not solve the situation but it can reduce the feeling of carrying it alone. It can also help somebody reach practical, emotional or professional support while they still have more choices available.

What It Can Look Like

Asking for help can be indirect. Somebody might say, "I can't deal with all this" "I haven't slept properly for weeks" or "Everything is getting on top of me."



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They may mention money, family, relationships or work without calling it a mental health problem. Sometimes people test whether it feels safe to talk by sharing a small part of what is happening first. Not every difficult day needs professional help. A conversation with a friend, some practical advice or time to recover may be enough. However, when a problem continues, affects everyday life or leaves somebody feeling unsafe, further support is important.

What Can Help

Choose a suitable moment. Checking in privately, when neither person is rushing, is usually better than asking in front of a group. Begin with what you have noticed rather than making an assumption. You could say, "You've seemed quieter than usual lately. How are things?" or "You mentioned you haven't been sleeping. Do you want to talk about it?" If they say they are fine, do not force the conversation. Let them know the offer is genuine and check in again another time. People do not always feel ready to speak the first time they are asked.

If somebody opens up, listen. Give them time, avoid interrupting and do not immediately turn the conversation towards your own experience. You do not need to produce an answer or say something clever. Responses such as, "That sounds really difficult" "Thank you for telling me" or "What would be helpful right now?" can show that you are taking them seriously.

Avoid telling them to cheer up, toughen up or focus on people who have it worse. Even when intended positively, those responses can make somebody feel dismissed. You are not expected to become someone's counsellor or carry the situation alone.



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Ask whether they would consider speaking to a trusted family member, tutor, apprenticeship adviser, GP, counsellor or support service. Offer to sit with them while they make contact if that would help, but let them make decisions wherever possible.

If somebody says they may harm themselves, cannot keep themselves safe or appears to be in immediate danger, take it seriously. Do not promise to keep it secret. Stay with them if it is safe to do so and involve a trusted member of staff, safeguarding lead or emergency service. If you need help yourself, you can make the first step smaller. Send a message saying, "Could we talk when you have time? I'm finding things difficult." You do not need to explain everything in the first sentence. If the first person does not respond helpfully, try somebody else. One poor response does not mean that nobody will listen.

Preparing for Life in Construction

Construction often depends on people looking out for one another. Teams check equipment, identify hazards and speak up when something is unsafe. Checking in with a person deserves the same care. You may work beside someone for weeks without knowing what they are carrying outside work. Early starts, travel, deadlines and personal pressures can affect anyone. Being a good workmate does not mean solving everybody's problems. It means noticing changes, asking a genuine question and helping somebody find further support when needed.



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Discussion Questions

- What can make a check-in feel genuine rather than automatic?
- What responses might discourage somebody from speaking further?
- How can you support someone without taking responsibility for solving everything?

Takeaway Message

You do not need perfect words to start a useful conversation and somebody does not need to be in crisis before they deserve support. Ask privately, listen properly and take what they say seriously. If more help is needed, involve somebody appropriate rather than carrying the situation alone. A simple conversation can be the point where somebody realises they no longer have to manage everything by themselves.

Action

Before the end of this week, check in properly with one person. Ask how they are, give them time to answer and listen without looking at your phone or rushing to offer advice.



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