



Want to help a friend?

If you have a friend you are concerned about or who wants help and assistance for mental health or alcohol and other drug issues, it is important to know that there are many different types of help available, and they do work.



Getting help can take a bit of time and effort but it is worth it. Good help will assist your friend to deal with their problems and get back to their normal life. It's important to keep in mind that your friend may need to try more than one type of help as everyone is different and what works for one person may not work for another.

Things you might be worried about

You might be worried about changes in your friend's mood, behaviour or thinking. For example, they might have been generally happy, but are now moody and withdrawn. They might sleep all day but find it hard to sleep at night. They might be hearing or seeing things that aren't there, or be crying all the time and seem really 'down'.

You might also be worried about your friend's actions, like their use of alcohol or drugs or their sexual behaviour.

Where to start

If you feel comfortable talking to your friend about your concerns, this is the place to start. Let them know what is worrying you and how you would like to help them. Explain to them that many people like to talk with someone outside the situation such as a teacher, counsellor or doctor as they can offer a different perspective.

You can also talk to them about phoning help lines like Kids Helpline - 1800 55 1800 and Lifeline – 13 11 14, which are anonymous and confidential, to discuss your concerns.

If you are really concerned about someone then you could also talk to their family or other adults who are important in their life. You'll have to strike the right balance between your friend's right to privacy, and the need to make sure they are safe.

Getting information and finding out what services are around

There are a lot of services that can help you and your friend. If you are unsure where to go you might want to:

- Contact your local headspace centre, see the headspace help and other help sections of the headspace website www.headspace.org.au/home/getting-help
- Ask teachers, school counsellors, family members, or family friends
- See your local GP (doctor)
- Contact your local council and ask what youth services are in your local area

The next step is to contact the service to make an appointment. Often it's worth asking if they offer a "drop in" service so you don't need to make an appointment. Remember you can ring anonymously and still get the information.



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Contacting a service

When you contact a service the first person you talk to will probably be a receptionist or an 'intake' or 'duty worker' who will ask a range of questions to find out more about your friends' situation. You can also ask as many questions as you want to find out what kind of help they can offer.

This is a good time to get your friend to do some of the talking. You might sit with them as they arrange a time, and you might even go with them to their first appointment if they want you to, but it is important that it is their decision to get help.

Sometimes you might have to try more than one service to get the right sort of support. Encourage your friend to hang in there and keep trying. Remind them that help is available.

What if my friend doesn't want help?

Some people need some 'time' or 'space' before they're willing to accept help. Just giving them information about where to get help can be useful.

Using the internet to read stories about other young people who have made it through difficult times might help reduce their feelings of isolation and give them hope for the future.

The best help you can give is to continue being a good friend. Listen, and show that you support them. But remember to look after yourself and your needs as well, as it can be very stressful when a friend has major problems.

Staying safe

If you're worried that your friend needs urgent medical help or might hurt themselves or somebody else, you need to tell somebody immediately, even if they have asked you not to. This could be a parent, teacher, their doctor, or someone from a local health service. If you think it's very urgent, ring for an ambulance or the police on 000.

For more information, and to find out how to get help, visit the **headspace** website: www.headspace.org.au