

# What to Say (and What Not to Say)

*when supporting individuals in their mental health*



**Project EDSA**  
**Resource Library**  
*for friends and loved  
ones*

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# What to Say (and What Not to Say)

Watching your friend struggle with their mental health is never easy. Even when you want to be there for them, it's hard to know what the right thing to say is.

Sometimes, even with the best intentions, your words might come out wrong or be taken in a way you didn't expect.

That doesn't make you a bad friend. It just means these conversations are hard — especially when no one ever really explained how to have them.

This guide breaks down what's helpful and what's not when you're trying to support someone through their recovery. If you're not sure what to say or how to help, this guide is a good place to start.

## First, check-in with yourself:

Before you support someone else, take a moment to check in with yourself. Make sure you're in a good headspace. Helping a friend can bring up a lot of emotions and can sometimes be stressful even for the person helping. You can't pour from an empty cup, and showing up for someone else starts with being honest about how you're doing too.

### Ask yourself:

- ***Am I feeling emotionally okay today?***
- ***Do I have the energy to really listen and support someone?***
- ***Can I be there for them without taking everything on myself?***

If not, it's okay to take a step back and care for yourself first.

Showing up as your real self is more helpful than showing up while burnt out.



## What *not* to say:

“You’re being dramatic”

“Just try to be happy”

“You have nothing to be sad about”

“Everyone feels like that sometimes”

“You’re overreacting”

“But you seem fine”

“It’s not that big of a deal”

“Try harder” or “Just push through it”

“You always do this”

## What to say *instead*:

“That sounds really hard. Do you want to talk about it?”

“You don’t have to go through this alone”

“I don’t have the right words, but I’m here for you”

“You don’t have to be okay all the time”

“I care about you no matter what”

“You don’t have to explain everything. I just want you to know I’m here”





# Providing support through your actions

What you say can make a difference, but how you show up often speaks louder. Support doesn't always mean having long conversations or fixing everything. Sometimes it's about small, quiet choices that remind someone they're not alone.

Here are some ideas on how you can support your friend beyond just your words:

## **Send a kind message, even if they don't respond**

Let them know you're thinking of them. It could be something simple like "I'm here for you" or "Hope today feels a little easier." Even if they don't reply, it still means something.

## **Sit beside them during a rough day**

You don't have to talk or give advice. Just being there, doing something normal like watching a show or listening to music, can make someone feel safer.

## **Invite them to do something low-pressure**

Offer to go for a walk, watch a movie, or hang out without expectations. Sometimes the best support is giving them a break from everything else.

## **Respect their space without pulling away**

If they say they need time alone, let them have it, but check in later. A simple "I'm still here when you're ready" helps them feel supported without pressure.





Project EDSA (Eating Disorder Support & Awareness) is a youth-led initiative dedicated to uplifting lived experiences, sharing honest recovery stories, and making support more accessible.

Through our Voices of Recovery project and student-written resource guides, we aim to amplify youth voices and offer the kind of supportive community we wish we had during our own recovery.

## **This resource is a part of Project EDSA's Resource Library.**

This is a growing collection of research-backed, student-created guides, tools, and support links designed to support mental health and eating disorder recovery. If there's a topic you'd like us to cover or if you're interested in creating a resource yourself, please feel free to let us know!

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