



Do you know someone who is struggling with what is going on in their life? Ever felt that you don't know what to say or do when someone is upset? Do you worry you may say the wrong thing or make matters worse?

Wisetalkers provides a practical guide help you prepare for those times when someone is distressed, increasing the confidence to start the conversation, respond appropriately and give them the support they need.

Having that conversation may make someone's day a bit better or it may be all that is needed to save someone's life.

What is **WISETALKERS** ?

WISETALKERS is an acronym to help you remember the key ways to encourage good communication.

WISE is about being prepared; managing yourself and the situation so you get the best possible outcome from a conversation.

Wellbeing, Individuality, Signs of Distress, Environment,

TALKERS provides practical tips for the conversation.

Tune-In, Ask, Listen actively without judgement, **Keep calm, Empower, Respond, Selfcare.**

- Wisetalkers provides a practical guide to reducing common barriers to good two-way communication. The knowledge and skills introduced are useful in day to day family, social and work settings by helping to promote respectful, supportive relationships.
- Wisetalkers is designed to increase the confidence to open a conversation with someone who is struggling with what is happening in their life, by providing tips on how to prepare.
- Wisetalkers introduces ways in which to encourage open and honest communication about thoughts and feelings, identifies some appropriate responses and where to direct people if more help is needed.
- Wisetalkers works on the principle that everyone can offer support in some form; you don't need to be an expert. It won't turn you into a trained counsellor and is not a replacement for professional help when this is needed.

WISE

is about being prepared; managing yourself and the situation so you get the best possible outcome from a conversation.

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Wellbeing. Everyone has bad days. Learn some quick tips to help you stay well and cope better with those times that get you down.



WHY IS WELLBEING IMPORTANT?

- YOU are important. Wellbeing is firstly about looking after your own physical and mental health.
- It is very difficult to support someone else if you are not feeling in a good place yourself. If you are relaxed, happy and coping with life it will be easier for you to remain calm, patient and supportive when others are not.
- Your knowledge of Wellbeing will help you support others to find what may work for them. By role modelling good wellbeing behaviours you may also help pass on good habits to those around you.

GREAT DREAM pulls together activities and approaches known to help promote wellbeing. Have a scroll through this web page (<http://www.actionforhappiness.org/10-keys>), or see the summary below, and think about what might work for you.

Know what works to help you de-stress, get over a bad day etc. It doesn't have to be a big thing- playing Xbox, listening to music, going round to a friend's, cuddling a cat etc. Understanding this about yourself, and being able to pick one as a quick fix when you are having a bad day, is a great way to help look after yourself. See



- *Make sure that however busy you are you have at least 30 minutes a day doing something you enjoy.*
- *If these are things that also contribute to your physical health that is good too!*
- *Find the fun in life!*

Wellbeing Activities

- *What new thing(s) can YOU do to look after your wellbeing?*

	Description	What more I will do to look after my wellbeing
G iving Do things for others	Doing something nice for someone else makes us feel good. Small things; offer to help, pay a compliment, make someone smile. Be a good friend. Reach out to someone struggling. Let them know you care.	
R elating Connect with people	Close, secure and supportive relationships with family and friends are really important. Build good quality relationships by sharing activities and experiences, having fun together, being able to talk openly and feel understood, giving and receiving support. Make more time for the people who matter.	
E xercising Take care of your body	Being active can instantly improve our mood. Find little ways to be more active everyday. Unplug from technology, get outside and get enough sleep! Eat healthily, drink more water. Notice what healthy actions lift your mood and do more of them.	
A wareness Live life mindfully	There's good stuff all around us. Often we don't notice or appreciate it. Stop and actively take notice of what you can see, hear, touch and taste, thoughts, feelings, physical sensations. Be in the moment. Anytime; when you are walking somewhere, eating or anything! Take 5 minutes every day to do this and get a bit of head space. Only observe, don't get caught up in thinking and worrying about what you are observing. This helps to stop us dwelling on the past or worrying about the future.	
T rying out Keep learning new things	Learning exposes us to new ideas and helps us stay curious and engaged. It also gives us a sense of accomplishment and helps boost our self-confidence and resilience. Share a skill with friends, join a club, play a new sport, do something small for the first time....	

<p>Direction</p> <p>Have goals to look forward to</p>	<p>Feeling good about the future is important. Choose ambitious but realistic goals which excite and motivate you. This gives our lives direction and brings a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment when we achieve them. Think of a goal and do one thing to get started.</p>	
<p>Resilience</p> <p>Find ways to bounce back</p>	<p>All of us have times of stress, loss or failure in our lives. We can't choose what happens to us but we can choose how we react to it. May not be easy to do but we can learn to do it better. When something is troubling you, do something you really enjoy. Talk it over with someone. It's OK to ask for help.</p>	
<p>Emotions</p> <p>Look for what's good</p>	<p>Positive emotions like joy, gratitude, pride, contentment, and inspiration make us feel good but also help us perform better and make us more resilient. Try to see the glass half full rather than the glass half empty in any situation. Try to smile and say something positive every time you walk into a room.</p>	
<p>Acceptance</p> <p>Be comfortable with who you are</p>	<p>No-one's perfect. We often compare a negative view of ourselves with an unrealistic view of others. Learn to accept yourself, warts and all. Be as kind to yourself as you are to others. Accept them for who they are too. See mistakes as opportunities to learn. Notice things you do well, however small. Recognise your strengths and make more of these.</p>	
<p>Meaning</p> <p>Be part of something bigger</p>	<p>People who have meaning and purpose in their lives (doing something that makes a difference, our family etc) feel more in control and get more out of what they do. Meaning and purpose are different for each of us.</p>	

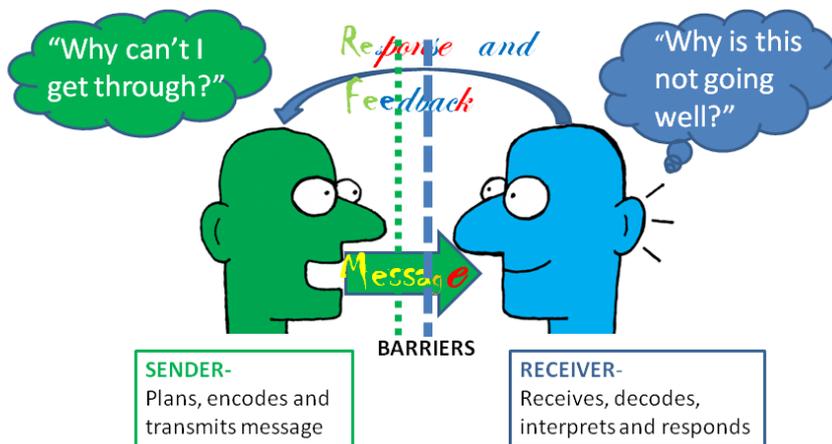
- **Write YOUR list of 10 things that make you feel good/happy/relaxed.**



Individuality. Our past and current experiences are unique to all of us and affect our immediate response to situations, often without us realising. Understanding this about ourselves and others allows us to communicate more effectively. Our uniqueness is great but it means that we can't ever assume we know what someone else thinks or feels about things.

Communication is as much about what we don't say as what we do; listening more than speaking and managing the situation, our responses and body language.

COMMUNICATION



Good communication needs a message to be sent and received with the intended meaning essentially unchanged. There are many potential barriers at each point in that process (sender, transmission, receiver).

This interaction is actually really complex but we are going to simplify it to look at someone as "Sender" ie needing help, and someone "Receiver" in a position themselves to help.

Both the "Sender" and "Receiver" have things going on in our own lives which affect that interaction. Recognising this fact helps the "Sender" understand why they don't always get the response they hoped for and the "Receiver" to manage their reactions and the situation. Both can get frustrated when they think their message isn't getting through.

The first key barrier to communication is each individual's perceptions of themselves and the person they are talking to.

INDIVIDUAL FINGERPRINT



From the day we are born our experiences influence the way we perceive the world, how we feel and how we act. This is unique to us, like our “Fingerprint” (Fingerprint Diagram above).

Each of us will see situations from our own perspective, based on our different “Fingerprint”. Both sides of a conversation are affected by this. The resulting misunderstandings can affect our relationships if they go unaddressed. We can all think of times an apparently minor misunderstanding has escalated into a big argument.

Our “Fingerprint” shapes what is “Important” to us (our Values) and what we accept to be “True” (our Beliefs). Together these form our Value Judgements; what we think of as good/bad, right/wrong.

We all assess, compare and judge ourselves and others against these, often without realising.

We can be hard on ourselves and others when we feel these comparisons aren't favourable. These judgements and comparisons can adversely affect our own self esteem as well as our relationships with others. Take a moment to think. When did you last see a post on Facebook or Snapchat and make some sort of judgement or comparison? This was based on *your* Fingerprint; a matter of personal opinion and perspective.

Because we don't know most of someone else's “Fingerprint” we use our own to fill in the gaps; we make assumptions about them or their situation. We

base these assumptions on outward appearances (Gender, age, how they dress, speak, race etc) or what we think we know, but no situation or person is exactly the same so we can get it wrong. For example, we link the appearance of being male or female to all sorts of expectations around how someone thinks, feels and should behave. A male stereotype is "Strong and silent" or "Boys don't cry".

We subconsciously go through this process of assumptions and comparisons/judgements in a lot of situations. If you catch yourself not believing what is being said, playing down what someone is feeling or criticising someone for what they have done these are your value judgements kicking in.

If we disapprove or disagree with something we may show this non-verbally through our body language and facial expression. We pick up these signs in each other. As "Receiver", we need to prevent these responses as best we can.

Positive assumptions about someone can be as problematic as negative ones.

For example, you could be talking to a mate about an exam and they are feeling worried that they haven't done very well. To you, this could sound completely ridiculous, as you feel that they always get good marks, they work hard, and that they are clever, so you tell them this. What you were trying to do was make them feel better but what you've actually done there is shut down their feelings based on your own assumptions, your 'Fingerprint'.

By recognising the impact of our "fingerprint" we are better placed to shut down all that "interference" created by our own perspective, and be open to someone else's view of the world, without assuming we know anything about them or their situation. This is really important and might sound obvious but it is REALLY HARD to do.

Accepting ourselves and others for who we are is key to our wellbeing. If we or others don't match up, we can choose to accept and move on rather than blame, criticise or ridicule. Don't sweat the small stuff!

Understanding why people don't always react as you expect

The second key barrier to communication is our own emotions and wellbeing on the day. These can affect our ability to deal positively with other people's problems. As Receiver you need to be able to stay calm as it will help the other person to regulate their emotions too. To do that we need to look after our own wellbeing.

We're not really taught about emotions and the importance of understanding and expressing them safely. We often feel uncomfortable when other people express strong negative emotions and may ignore them, worry that we may say or do the wrong thing and make it worse or we retaliate.

Men in particular are often still expected to be "strong and silent" and "Boy's don't cry" but everyone needs to be able to talk honestly about how they are feeling. Keeping it inside can be harmful. By being expected to be in control, and not admit to sadness or feeling anxious or scared, those negative emotions often come out as anger. Then we tell people not to be angry either, so how can they express it? It's not surprising that things sometimes escalate.

It is OK to get angry. It is a normal human emotion and not necessarily bad as it can help protect us and be a positive driver for change. If anger is regularly expressed through unhelpful or destructive behaviour, affecting the physical or mental health of the person or those around them, then help should be sought. *(Optional -If you are interested, find out more about Anger here.)*

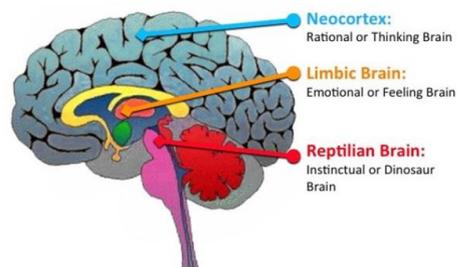
We all feel things differently, express these emotions differently and take on different behaviours as a result. It is part of our "Fingerprint". It may seem obvious, but you cannot tell someone else how to feel about something. It won't change how they feel. *They* feel that way so it is OK, even though you may not understand why.

The quick Science Bit!

The three parts of the brain all communicate with each other but the Instinctual and Emotional brain kick in before the Rational brain when there is a perceived threat.

When someone is in distress they are in their "Emotional Brain". They can't think about anything other than themselves and the here and now so they can be unpredictable.

BRAIN ANATOMY



They cannot be objective, see others' points of view or solutions to their problems until their Emotional brain has calmed down and the Rational brain gets control.

Someone in their "Rational Brain" may not see what someone is so upset about, but to the other person those feelings and worries are very real.

To get an idea of how people in the "Emotional Brain" see the world, imagine a beach scene with people swimming in the sea, bodyboarding etc. Imagine Will Smith "Miami" or Cliff Richard "Summer Holiday" playing. Now think of the same scene but this time with "Jaws" music. The scene looks and feels different doesn't it? The "Emotional Brain" may view the scene "with Jaws music" like this, with unseen threats, expecting something to happen.

Downward Spiral

Be aware that there is a link between feelings and behaviour that can tend to reinforce negative feelings. *For example, you feel bad (eg like no-one in your group likes you), this makes you act slightly differently with them, they pick up on this, feel hurt/angry etc and act in this way towards you. So you think "I was right. They don't like me. I'm rubbish etc"*

This can lead to a downward spiral. Being open to seeing other (less negative) explanations for situations and behaving differently as a result may help to stop this spiral.



- *Try looking for others' perspectives. It is OK if you don't understand them or don't agree.*
- *Try looking for other less negative explanations for others' behaviour. Can you just let it go?*
- *You may not be able to change how you feel but you can change how you behave.*

Individuality Activities

- **What values are important to you?** Here's a list here of some common ones to get you started but you may have different ones. Decide your top 3 and list them below, with the one most important to you first. Take a moment to think how they influence your views about yourself and others.

Abundance	Accountability	Achievement	Action	Adventure	Ambition	Awareness	Balance
Beauty	Being the Best	Calmness	Cheerfulness	Clarity	Comfort	Compassion	Competition
Connection	Contribution	Control	Courage	Creativity	Curiosity	Determination	Discipline
Effectiveness	Empathy	Energy	Enthusiasm	Excellence	Fairness	Faith	Fame
Family	Flexibility	Freedom	Friendship	Fulfillment	Fun	Harmony	Happiness
Health	Honesty	Honor	Humility	Independence	Integrity	Intelligence	Intimacy
Inspiration	Kindness	Knowledge	Liveliness	Love	Money	Nature	Passion
Peace	Perfection	Persistence	Philanthropy	Power	Respect	Security	Simplicity
Significance	Spirituality	Spontaneity	Strength	Stability	Success	Status	Teamwork
Tolerance	Tradition	Truth	Vitality	Wealth	Wisdom		

My three top values are..

(Why not ask your friends what their values are? You may be surprised)

Take a moment to think about assumptions/judgements you may have made eg:

- An occasion when you assumed something based on how a person spoke/ looked/ behaved, what you thought you knew etc
- A time when you didn't believe someone or maybe thought you knew better.

and how you might check out your assumptions or challenge your own judgements next time.



Signs of Distress. There are many ways to recognise when someone “Isn’t OK”. They may just be having a bad day or they may be experiencing something more longstanding. Picking up these signs in yourself and others can help manage difficult situations and find early support.

The diagram below shows some common signs of distress; things you might see, physical sensations, thoughts and feelings. These feelings are **very** common it's just we don't usually talk about it.

Be careful of your assumptions. Some people are very good at actively hiding external Signs and come across as outwardly happy/joking/ the life and soul. Their distress will be shown to someone though, perhaps subtly in jokes or a throw away comment.

SIGNS OF DISTRESS

Outward Signs

- Sad /Crying
- Irritable/ Angry
- Panicky/Worried/Scared
- Withdrawn/avoiding behaviours
- Speaking very slowly/quickly
- Very slow moving/Agitated
- Not making eye contact
- Trembling/Fidgety
- Sleep disturbance
- Appetite disturbance
- Lack of personal care
- Unusual risk taking
- Using more alcohol/drugs
- Self Harm

Physical Sensations



Thoughts/Feelings

- Loss of interest
- No pleasure in life
- Empty/Numb
- Helplessness/Hopeless
- Guilt
- Low self esteem
- Ashamed/Weak
- Loss of concentration
- Mind racing/go blank
- Lonely/isolated
- On edge
- Confused
- Scared
- “Going Mad”

These Signs are largely non-specific and are things that we all experience at one time or another. They can happen in various combinations. We notice them at certain times then they go away again.

Experiencing these Signs can be confusing and worrying. People often think that they are the only ones that feel like this.

People may think they have something physically wrong with them. Men in particular often go to the GP with physical symptoms like stomach or heart problems, not linking these to how they are feeling emotionally.

There is stigma and often shame in admitting some of these feelings, particularly for men who often think they should be able to control them so see it as a personal weakness. Distress such as fear, anxiousness or sadness may come out as anger. In these cases, try to find out what is *really* bothering them.

The Signs may be noticed as a recent change in someone's usual behaviour or they may be more longstanding. It may be that someone has been finding it hard to cope for some time, so their "usual" behaviour has become angry/withdrawn/grumpy etc. In these cases, go back and look again.

If the feelings are not going away, are affecting someone most days, stop them from doing things they enjoy or makes them feel they can't cope, some advice from a GP may help.

When people are distressed you may feel rejected or hurt by what they say or do. Try to keep doing what you think is right. Don't let their actions push you away.

Suicide Risk

- Identifying someone at risk of suicide is very difficult. There is no list of risk factors that reliably achieves this. There will be Signs of Distress, however some may be actively hidden.
- Significant life events may increase risk but also things that others discount as insignificant (eg the death of a pet) may be "the final straw". It is what the event means to that individual; their perceptions of their personal situation at that time.
- Increased risk often relates to perceived "loss". This can be loss of something (money/job/home), someone (relationship breakdown/bereavement) or something less obvious like perceived loss of a future, loss of self worth etc.
- The only way you will really know if they are at risk is if they tell you, honestly.

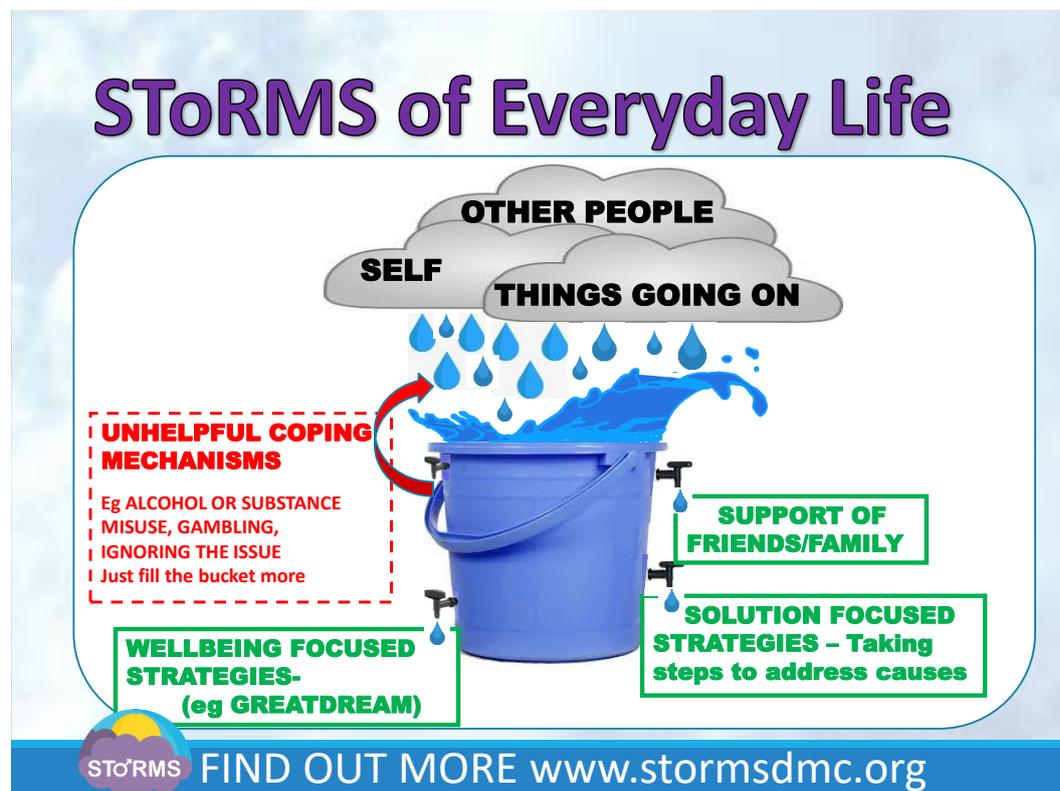
The Optimal Range

The second key barrier to communication is our emotions and wellbeing on the day. These can affect our ability to deal positively with other people's problems. As Receiver you need to be able to stay calm as it will help the other person to regulate their emotions too. To do that we need to look after our own wellbeing.

There is an optimal state where we are comfortable and dealing well with what is going on, both inside ourselves (our feelings/emotions) and from the outside world. When things get too much, some people move upwards out of this optimal range and become angry/stressed/talk fast/jittery. Others withdraw and don't talk to anyone and slow down/shut down.

Some people get stuck at the top end of the optimal range and it takes very little to tip them over into angry/OTT behaviour. The "SToRMS of Everyday Life" diagram explains a bit more about this.

We all have bad days. Some days little things annoy/frustrate us, others we take them in our stride. Coping with daily life can be hard. Even without really bad stuff happening, there are often lots of things going on and lots being dealt with for the first time. It can get quite overwhelming.



Think of it like a bucket being filled by rain. Everyone's capacity for dealing with what life throws at us (the rain bucket) is different.

The things that wind us up/upset us (the rainclouds) fill the bucket. The more rainclouds the quicker the bucket fills.

The things that make us feel better let some of the water out. These may be really small things that happen, like someone smiling at you, or someone thanking you for something. You can also do things yourself. This may be as

easy as talking to a friend about it, trying the Wellbeing strategies (GREAT DREAM) and/or Solution focused strategies (starting to address the cause of your problem). Avoiding the issue or Alcohol /Drug use/ gambling etc may seem like good coping strategies but they actually just fill up the bucket more.

There have always been pressures from thoughts you have about yourself, relationships with others, and stuff going on. Often they overlap. The "Connectedness" of social media has the power to add to these pressures or ease them. Remember lots of little, apparently insignificant things can fill up the bucket as much as a couple of big things.

Examples

- **Self-** No-one liked my Facebook post. I knew I'd mess up. Everyone likes my brother. I wish I looked like them. Only perfection is good enough.
- **Others-** Someone broke your favourite mug and won't own up. Someone was hogging the bathroom. They said they would do something and didn't.
- **Stuff-** You missed the bus/got cut up at the lights/couldn't find anywhere to park. You're struggling to keep up with all the things you have to do. Next door's dog kept you awake again.

These same things may also take water out of your bucket at other times (getting on well with someone, positive feedback at school /work, linking with friends over social media etc).

Whilst the water stays in the bucket we are coping. When it overflows this is often expressed as a sudden change in behaviour; Outward Signs such as anger, tears etc. If our bucket is already filled near the top, it may only take a small drop to make it overflow. Someone's reaction to this small thing may seem completely out of proportion but what else is going on in their life/filling up their bucket?

When the bucket overflows they are in their Emotional Brain and their behaviour may be unpredictable. You may have to decide whether to help them calm down or get out of their way. You need to keep yourself safe. They will not be able to have a reasoned discussion until they have calmed down.



- *You don't know how someone is feeling unless they tell you, honestly.*
- *Be familiar with the Signs of Distress.*
- *Recognise when the bucket may be full.*

Signs Activity

Take a moment to think:

<i>Stressed? What is filling up your bucket</i>	<i>What are your taps?</i>
<i>-Self</i>	<i>Support</i>
<i>-Others</i>	<i>Solutions</i>
<i>-Things going on</i>	<i>Wellbeing</i>
<i>-Unhelpful Coping mechanisms</i>	
<i>WHAT GOOD THINGS HAVE HAPPENED?</i>	

- ***Think about a recent argument or time when someone flared up over “nothing”. Could something else have been going on? What could you do differently?***



Environment is about creating a “safe” place to talk and understanding your personal boundaries/responsibilities in a given situation. What are the expectations of the other person / you/ your role/ your organisation? We all have an opportunity to influence what is "normal" behaviour in our friendship groups, at home or elsewhere.

Personal Boundaries/Responsibilities

The interaction, level and type of involvement and responsibility may be very different if you are talking to your child, a family member, friend, someone you have just met, someone you are employed to help. You need to be clear. If at work, know the policies and procedures. As a general member of the public, who just wants to help someone, there are no expectations that you can or will help. Sometimes though there is only one opportunity to help and that may be now, with you. Don't leave it to someone else.

Language and kindness

Everyone needs somewhere in their life where they feel able to unload and talk honestly. The various "groups" we are part of (family/friends/others) all have their part to play in this. You may say things in one setting but not another. We often alter our language and behaviour depending on who we are talking to and what we feel is OK for that "group". As a part of these groups you can help shape what is acceptable. Bear in mind:

- People are unlikely to talk openly about what is bothering them if they don't feel it's safe to do so. They need to trust you. Will you judge them/criticise/laugh at them/tell them they're being stupid/weak? Will it end up on Twitter?
- Set the tone by the environment you have; a “Safe” environment with respect for differences, being kind, thinking about what you say and how it might affect someone else. Language is very important. Try to avoid comments or words that are your value judgements or may be hurtful /offensive to people.
- You don't know what is going on in other people's lives and what they haven't told you. What you think is funny, said as “banter”, may be hurtful to someone in the room, particularly if they are feeling low already. They may not let on how badly this affected them.
- Once someone has been able to talk to you/establish trust, they are more likely to continue talking to you.
- No-one is perfect. We will all need others' acceptance, tolerance and support at some time.

Physical environment

Talking about stuff that is bothering you can be really hard, particularly if you are in a group of people. It is easier talking one on one with someone you trust. The right place to do this will be different for everybody. Being in view of other people, having someone around but not listening or part of the conversation works OK when you don't know someone well. You need to keep yourself safe.

In safe situations with friends or family being one-on-one is usually good. Doing an activity together that allows you to give them your full attention whilst occupied with something else (like going for a walk, doing the dishes etc) can be as good as sitting down facing each other and it may be easier to start the conversation.

The best way to communicate is in person because of all the nonverbal information going between you, and the power in human contact. Speaking on Skype or on the phone is the next best option, with text/email/Facebook etc being the least effective and particularly prone to misunderstandings. If you are worried about someone you know try to meet up with them if you can.

Time

Do you have a set amount of time available? (Other options? Policies?)

Do you have time to talk? If you are planning to start the conversation try to make sure you both have enough time available and neither of you have to be off somewhere. Be realistic. It can take time to open up. If either of you are looking at the clock it just may not happen. If it takes longer than you think and you are running out of time, say so and make sure you both have agreed and, wherever possible, **put in place** a clear plan for "What next". When people are down there are many things that may prevent them from taking that next step after they leave.

If they have come to you and want to talk about something that is bothering them it may not be a good time for you. Can you make time now? Do you think they are at immediate risk? If not, acknowledge that how they are feeling is important to you, that you will help them, agree a time to meet up with them (soon) and stick to it.

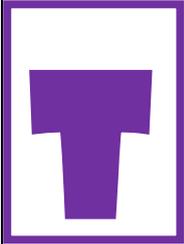


- *Think about the language and be kind*
- *Talk one on one, preferably face to face if you can*
- *If it is not the right time for either one of you, fix a new time (soon) and stick to it.*

Environment Activity What can YOU do to encourage open and honest conversation?

TALKERS

practical tips for the conversation



Tune In. Most conversations will be completely normal and easy but occasionally there may be something that makes you think “There is more to this”. It may just be a gut feeling. Look past their words. Be aware of non-verbal “s = **SIGNS** of Distress”.

Communication Is Two Way

Communication is a process where a message is passed from one person to another. For it to be effective it needs someone to send a clear message that is then received with the original meaning unchanged. Individuality and Environment explain why, just by being human, messages often don't get through properly. During conversation the effect of subtle misunderstandings and assumptions can build up as the messages continue back and forth. TALKERS gives some practical tips on how to avoid the common pitfalls during difficult conversations.

Tune In

Coping with daily life can be hard, particularly when we are exposed to new experiences that we haven't worked out how to deal with yet. This can be a significant issue for young people where lots of new things are being encountered at the same time. University life is a good example of this. Students' expectations around now "being an adult and so should be able to cope" often prevent help being actively sought, at a time when perhaps they are most in need. Sometimes they don't even realise they need help. By Tuning In to those around us we may see the Signs they cannot, and help them get the support they need.

People transmit information verbally and non-verbally and these sometimes give conflicting messages. For example, someone saying they are fine when their non-verbal Signs suggest otherwise. We might pick this up as something not being quite right, without being able to put our finger on exactly what this is. Just a gut feeling? Go with it.

Signs of Distress are often actively hidden so when recognised should be checked out. Keep tuned in to changes during the conversation. If you have known someone for some time you may stop recognising the non-verbal Signs (easily angered/tearful/agitated/withdrawn) for what they are. We may grow

accustomed to “that’s just the way they are” or accepted it as “just a phase” or “normal teen behaviour”. Take time to look at these behaviours in a new light. Find out what is behind these emotions/behaviours.

Social Media

Their posts on Facebook or Twitter may make you think things are not quite right. (Optional - Samaritans and Facebook have put together some advice for how look out for someone online [here](#)). Don’t ignore/ scroll past, even if you don’t know them well. You might feel awkward checking out if they are ok, but it’s better to feel awkward than say nothing.

Tune in to your own emotional state too.

By understanding what is happening in ourselves (“I am getting a bit stressed/angry etc”) and learning what works for us to bring us back into the optimal range, we may be able to find ways to stay calm and prevent our own emotions and behaviours from escalating already emotionally charged, tense situations.

- Learn to actively acknowledge what emotion you are feeling. Put a word to it (see some more [unusual ones here!](#) or on the next page). Practice telling someone how you are feeling and, if negative, calmly telling them what you need to feel better.
- Learn to pick up any physical signs associated with how you are feeling. (Stop and concentrate. Exactly how are you feeling right now? Relaxed/tense/..?? How does that feel physically? Think about how you are breathing, heart rate, muscle tension, other sensations.) Learn to notice when and how these change.

You need to be able to accept that there will be times that you are not in the right place yourself to help someone (too stressed yourself? Is your bucket full?) and dealing with someone else’s problems in a supportive way might be more than you can handle. This is OK. You need to be honest with yourself and look after yourself too. If the conversation is outside what you feel comfortable with or can cope with on the day try **“Sounds like that’s really difficult for you. Have you got someone you can talk to about this?”** which will signal you are not the right person. Find other ways to deal with an immediate situation.



- *Be aware of possible "Signs of Distress" in yourself and others.*
- *Practice tuning in to those around you. Look past their words.*
- *Tune in to your own emotional state too.*



Ask. Don't assume anything. You are not a mindreader. If you think something is wrong, ask. Check it out. Choose your "E=Environment" first.

Consider the best "E=Environment" for the conversation.

Be clear on your Personal Boundaries, optimise the Physical situation for your conversation and be clear of the Time available first.

How to start the conversation.

- If you feel uncomfortable asking a friend you can acknowledge it **"I feel awkward/nervous about bringing this up, but I need to ask because I care/am worried about you...."** This may help them feel less defensive.
- Try to avoid asking "How are you?" as they will probably just say "Fine". We all do it. Try something that shows you have noticed something different like **"You're looking stressed today/ You're very quiet today. What's been going on?"**
- They may close down the conversation (that is ok) but will have had the opportunity to open up. Take their lead. If you are still concerned, you may want to gently try asking again in a different way, or remind them you care and they can talk to you anytime or suggest catching up later. Stay Tuned In and play it by ear.
- They may not want to talk. Maybe just spending some time with you will help. Maybe next time they will feel able to talk.
- Remember, you may feel awkward asking but you can't really say anything wrong. Just be kind and interested in them and what they say. It is worse not to ask, not to acknowledge that they may be distressed, particularly if they are feeling that no-one cares. This may be the right time to ask them. Don't leave it to someone else.

Concerned about self harm?

In situations where you think the person may be at risk of harming themselves make sure you **ask them clearly "Are you thinking of harming yourself/taking your own life?"** Don't ask "Are you having dark thoughts?" or say "You're not thinking of doing anything silly are you?" It will be scary to ask but it will **NOT** encourage them to take their own life. It can be a relief to them to feel they can talk about it and it opens up the possibility of getting them the help they need. Sometimes making them confront their thoughts, aware that someone else cares can be crucial in saving their life. Don't be too quick to accept denials or jokes.

If you don't feel able to ask, tell them you are worried about them, and that you will help them to get the help they need. (later in this module).

Always take it seriously if someone says they want to take their own life. Thoughts of suicide are common. It doesn't necessarily mean they are at immediate risk. **Find out if they have made a plan and get advice from KEY SERVICES** (Later in this Module). If they have **started to act on their plan** and are at immediate risk (eg taken overdose) don't leave them alone, if safe to do so, and **ring 999 or take them to A&E**.

(30 minute online training on Suicide Prevention here [Zero Suicide Alliance-Let's Talk](#)).

Are you the one who is upset?

If you are the one who is upset by something someone has said or done, try to tell them so, calmly, early on. Your needs, thoughts and feelings are as important and valid as anyone else's. Putting your needs across, whilst balancing them with the needs of others, is good. This is being assertive, where you think not just about your needs (that would be aggressive), and not just theirs (that would be submissive).

The longer you leave it before having the conversation the more tension may build up. If you are angry though, and feel like you might lose your temper, wait until you are calm. Then explain to them how you are feeling and what you need to help you feel better, so they understand and have a chance to put it right. They may not even realise that you are upset, let alone why- they have a different "Fingerprint".

How you approach this conversation can be important. 'You-statements' put people on the defensive and often lead to a hostile response. On the other hand, 'I-statements' have the opposite effect. When we point the finger at ourselves (rather than the other person) and avoid blaming them, we usually get a more positive response. For example, **'I feel disappointed that you cancelled at the last minute' rather than 'You've let me down again'**.

Assuming that others know what you want can create all sorts of problems. When you hint rather than make a clear statement, or ramble on rather than state your thoughts clearly, people don't always get the message. So, if there is something that you need to say it's helpful to tell it as it is, as considerately as you can – don't hint.

So, putting that together, here's an example.

Try to avoid exaggerating or accusatory language like “Why can’t you ever be ready on time”. **Instead describe the situation, rather than what *they* did**, then say **how it made *you* feel** “I get really wound up when we're late.” and **what you need** “I'd be a lot more chilled if we could leave on time” **and options that recognise your needs and theirs** “how can we sort it next time?”.

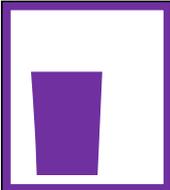
You have just learned basic assertiveness skills which will be useful in all parts of your life! (Optional -If you want to know more about assertiveness watch this [short video \(2mins 34s\)](#) or read [How To Be Assertive here](#)).



- *Don't assume you know how someone feels. Ask.*
- *"How are you?" may not work. Try saying what you see "You're quiet today. What's been going on?"*
- *Be assertive and talk about things that are bothering you early on.*

Ask Activity

We will all have different ways of asking if someone is OK; ways that feel right to us, with that person at that time. Write down how you might start the conversation at home/work/with friends.



Listen Actively Without Judgement. Active listening is basically about talking less, giving that person your full attention and showing you hear what they are saying. In order to do this without judgement you must be able to leave your own views to one side and be open to theirs.

This may sound easy but actually putting it into practice can be very hard and there will be times you don't do it as well as you hoped. This is fine. Look back on what happened and learn from it. If appropriate, when things have calmed down, go back and try again.

If you let people talk they will process their own thoughts and feelings and will probably come up with solutions for themselves, without you saying a word.

Below are some things to think about if you have a chance to prepare for a difficult conversation.

Keep the focus on them

- It is easy to be distracted. People pick up when you are not really listening and it will make them clam up. Give the person your full attention (put down your phone, make eye contact, turn towards them, **nod appropriately or say "hmmm" to encourage them to talk**)
- Make it clear you want to know more about what is going on and are listening.
- Don't interrupt. Keep listening rather than thinking what you will say next and don't answer until they have finished speaking. Don't jump in with "Oh yeah. That happened to me..." and go off on your own story.
- Don't assume you know what people are going to say- wait for them to say it. Leave silences. They will probably fill them. This may feel awkward but that's OK. However sometimes this is not enough to start conversations or restart them if stalled. If this happens then try to Find Out More (below).

Find out more

- Ask **open questions** (How long, How, What, Where, When, Who- be careful with Why as it may seem like you are challenging their view) or
- **"Tell me more about...."** to find out more detail
- **"How did that make you feel?" This is really important.** This open question is ideal. Putting the emphasis on "that" can make it sound less clinical but if it doesn't feel right find your own way to discover how *they feel* about their situation.

- **ACKNOWLEDGE** how they are feeling. **Just a nod or a “Hmm” is enough or “You sound really fed up/angry/upset about that” or “That sounds hard”**. They may go on and explain or just say “yes, but I’m just getting on with it etc”. You have given the chance to talk if they wanted to, so it is OK if they close it down. Follow their lead.
- **VALIDATE** their feelings. Whatever they are feeling is individual to them. You may not understand it (“Fingerprint”) but it is how they feel and OK. Tell them so **“It’s OK to feel like that”**.

Try not to do things that may stop them talking

- Be patient. It can be difficult to talk about how you are feeling. It can take time to get round to it.
- Don’t respond negatively to what they say. Don’t judge/criticise/blame /tell them not to be stupid/compare/lecture or try to turn it into a joke because you feel uncomfortable. Don’t get defensive if you feel you are being criticised.
- Try not to look hurt/angry/shocked by what they tell you, however it makes you feel. This is not about you.
- Sometimes they may ask for your advice. Don’t leap in with advice if it hasn't been asked for.
- Empathy not sympathy. Empathy is about the other person; seeing the situation from their perspective and trying to understand how they feel. Sympathy is about you; feeling pity, sorrow or compassion. Whilst you might feel sympathy, try to avoid saying things that turn the focus onto how their situation makes you feel or make them feel pitied such as “I feel so sorry for you”. This is disempowering and doesn’t encourage them to say more. Instead try **“That sounds awful.”**
- Don’t say you understand how they feel. You really don’t know what they are feeling (“Fingerprint”) unless they tell you honestly themselves.
- Don’t offer false, superficial reassurance or dismiss/play down what is happening (such as “Everything’ll be fine” “I can’t see what you’re worried about”). Acknowledge how hard this must be for them.

Check out that you have understood what they have said

- Reflect back to them what they have said. It shows you have heard and if you’ve got it wrong they can correct you.
- Ask closed questions (with a Yes or No answer eg **“Do you mean xxxx?”**) to check out your understanding.

The power of Touch.

Touch can be calming and help people to feel connected. A hug is good if you know them but just putting your hand on someone’s arm, eye contact, a smile

can make people feel better. Remember that some cultures are uncomfortable being touched by people they don't know. If in doubt check it out first.



- *Listen, be interested in what they are saying and be kind.*
- *Acknowledge and validate what they are feeling even if you don't understand it.*
- *Practice Active Listening with family and friends and see what happens!*

Listen Activity

Look at the video below then list the ways you can see that the man is not listening. <https://youtu.be/jDd9HQ3cPlc>



Keep Calm. By keeping calm yourself you will help someone who is in their “Emotional Brain” and struggling to regulate their emotions to calm down and go back into their “Rational Brain” (I=Individuality).

Staying calm yourself can be really hard to do, particularly when someone is very upset or angry. It is important that you keep your own emotions out of the situation. You might agree with what you hear but try not to say or do anything that might “fan the flames” making it take longer for them to calm down.

Try to not react negatively (either verbally or non-verbally), even if they are saying things that are hurtful. They are in their "Emotional Brain" where they can only see their own perspective in the here and now, so try to let it wash over you. If you lose control too and retaliate, be sarcastic or act like the victim things are likely to escalate. If you feel you are “losing it”, try communicating how you feel, calmly, to them. Be clear why YOU need time out. Say how important it is to you to help them and that you will come back to talk it through in xx minutes. If at any time you feel unsafe, remove yourself from the situation as quickly as you can.

We are all continually moving through different emotions. You will not be able to wave a magic wand and sort out someone’s problems but by keeping calm and just being with them you may be able to help them ride out those negative emotions until they pass.

Simply being there for them, in whichever way they need, (maybe just chilling together, sitting in silence, letting them talk, a hug etc) will help them to process what they are feeling and become calmer. Telling someone in their "Emotional Brain" to calm down rarely works. In fact it is likely to make them worse. Only when they are calm and back in their “Rational Brain” will they be able to see different perspectives and start thinking about solutions to their problems. This calming takes varying lengths of time so try to be patient and work with what you see.



Try to let what they say wash over you and try not to react negatively.

Don't tell them to calm down!

Try to let go of any hurtful things they may have said to you



Empower. Once they are calm, and their “Rational Brain” is able to start looking at the situation, they may start to look for solutions. If not, don't push it. Follow their lead.

- Be clear on your boundaries; that you are not an expert and that what worked for you or what you think might work may not be right for them (different Fingerprint). It is better to be honest and say you don't know what they should do but you can find out together. If someone is possibly at risk or in crisis be particularly careful of offering advice- signpost to Key Services (see later in module).
- Try not to advise or jump in with your own ideas about what they should do. Find out what THEY think they need in order to feel better. **“What do you need to happen?” “Have you talked to anyone else about this?” “Would you like to get some help?”** Helping them come up with their own options and next steps is useful.
- Knowing the Key Services information and other ways to get help will provide a few options to add to their own ideas to think through and choose from. By putting them in control they are more likely to access help than if they are told what to do.
- If they suggest a solution that you think is wrong, is this just your perspective? Is it a Wellbeing or Solutions focused strategy (remember the "SToRMS of Everyday Life" diagram in Signs of Distress)? If it doesn't pose a risk to them or others can you support them in their choice? You can help them to think it through by acknowledging their feelings/idea **“I can see how much you would like to xxxxx. What do you think might happen if you do that?”** Don't link these sentences with “but” as it takes the power out of acknowledging their idea/ feelings.

More about "And" not "But"

Have you ever been in a conversation where someone has agreed with you and then you think "I can feel a but coming..."? That little word "but" can take all the power out of whatever positive thing has been said before. Try to avoid using "but" if you can. You can use two separate sentences instead (like above). If needed you can put two opposing views forward by linking them with "and" instead. It validates both points of view.



- *Find out what THEY need to feel better*
- *Remember "And" not "But"*



Respond. Support and Signpost. By Listening you may already have given all the support necessary.

Some options are:

- 1. Support by listening-** Just this one time. (Or arrange to meet up again soon- Make a date and stick to it)
- 2. Encourage them to talk to someone they trust.**
- 3. Signpost to appropriate services** (Have Key Services info)
- 4. Offer to be there for them to talk to-** Spend some time together. Keep in touch. Be a good friend.
- 5. Actively support them to get professional help** (GP etc)
- 6. If at immediate risk of harm make sure they are not left alone (if safe to do so), phone 999/take them to A&E.**

Everyone can do numbers 1 to 3, even with a stranger.

If the feelings are not going away, are affecting someone most days, stop them from doing things they enjoy or make them feel they can't cope, some advice from a GP may help.

Remember that if this person has opened up to you they clearly trust you. Be worthy of that trust and don't gossip. However, if you are concerned that person or others may be at risk you should not keep what you have been told a secret. Tell the person you are concerned about them and that you are going to help them get the support they need and contact one of the Key Services for advice.



- *Be a good friend.*
- *Know where to find out more about key services.*



Self Care. Supporting someone can be hard on you too. Talk to someone you trust about it -without using names.

Look after yourself- do your 30 minutes Happy time a day!

KEY SERVICES

☎ FREE 24/7 Telephone support

-Childline (to age 18)- Call **0800 1111**

-Samaritans – Call **116 123**

-Sheffield MH Helpline **0808 8010440**

Online help and information

-www.sheffieldmentalhealth.co.uk

-www.stormsdmc.org for more links

[The Sheffield Mental Health website](#) pulls together information on a number of mental health conditions, local and national services. It also has a page telling you how to get urgent help.

Some other ideas for where to find early support

SToRMS [Help Someone](#) and [Get Help](#) pages provide some other ideas for where to find early support for adults, young people and children as well as suicide prevention support. There are links to:

- Face to face, text, web chat or phone support
- Information and advice web sites
- Downloadable apps
- How to get the best out of a GP appointment
- Suicide prevention charities

The finishing line is in sight!

Might seem pretty obvious but a lot of this is much harder to actually do than it is to explain. Keep at it and it will get easier. Remember even the experts don't get it right every time. That's just life so learn from it and do it better next time.

Putting what you have learned into practice - the most important bit!

Your last activity is to put everything you have learned into practice, in as many parts of your life as you can.

Have you been putting off talking to someone because you have been worried that you don't know what to say, that you might make matters worse for them or that the situation may be awkward? Have they been acting weird with you and you don't know why? Have you argued and didn't know how to make up? Have you just lost touch? Make contact and use what you have learned.

Below is a brief WISE TALKERS summary to help you with this. (If you want to have the full course content it is available free to download here www.stormsdmc.org/wisetalkers)



Be Prepared

Wellbeing- Look after yourself. What makes you happy? Do it!- 30 mins/day

Individuality- Be self-aware. Respect others' differing views and feelings.

Signs of Distress-Learn outward signs, sensations, thoughts and feelings

Environment- Create a safe space to talk openly.

Tune In- **S**igns? Look past words. Don't assume, check it out.

Ask- Be interested "You look sad/angry/etc. What's been going on?" Suicide risk?- Be direct "Are you thinking of taking your own life?"

Listen actively without judgement- Let **them** talk. Acknowledge and validate their feelings.

Keep calm- This will calm them too. Once calm...

Empower- "What do you need/want to happen?"

Respond- Support, Signpost

Self-care- Supporting can be hard on **YOU**. Talk to someone about it -without names. Look after yourself.

FIND OUT MORE AT www.stormsdmc.org

Get as many other people as you can on board with WISSETALKERS. Kindness, mutual respect and support- what's not to like? You may never know whether your apparently minor, insignificant support changed the course of someone's life for the better. Just do it.

We all need WISSETALKERS around us.

Additional Information

5 Ways to Wellbeing and a bit more- "GREAT DREAM"

<http://www.actionforhappiness.org/10-keys>

What are your Values?

https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_85.htm

Emotions words list

<http://www.psychpage.com/learning/library/assess/feelings.html>

More about Anger [here](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/anger/about-anger/#.WEVQt32d36M).- <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/anger/about-anger/#.WEVQt32d36M>.

How to be assertive

<https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/Assertiveness.htm>

How to look out for someone online [here](#)

(<http://www.samaritans.org/sites/default/files/kcfinder/files/help-a-friend-in-need.pdf>)

Free Online courses

See, Say, Signs – Suicide Prevention Training. Free 30 minute Course

<http://www.zerosuicidealliance.com>

Free Mental Health E learning (for university staff or teachers)

www.cwmt.org.uk/e-learning

Suggested reading both by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish.

"How To Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk" and

"How To Talk So Teens Will Listen and Listen So Teens Will Talk"

Below are some links to good video resources

Mental Health - Young People

["We all have problems"](#) Key words- young people, talk, normal.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCqm0V8nerY>

["How many teachers does it take to change a lightbulb ?"](#) Key words, prevalence, facts, Peer support.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SE5lp60_HJk

["Young men's mental health"](#)- Key words- facts, told by young men
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cn8pGAgQLww>

["How are you feeling"](#) Key words, colleague, Fear, discomfort.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdPZ7rw0wMc>

["5 Tips on how to start a conversation about mental health."](#) Key words- talk, start, ideas <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FGiqn5MK1TY>

["How to spot signs of mental ill health."](#) Key words- facts, anxiety, depression, bipolar, schizophrenia, OCD. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FB49AezFJxs>

Suicide Prevention

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wUKJaDvPIG0> This short Owen Jones interview "Why do so many men die by suicide" gives "[one young man's insight into the problems they face](#)".

["Student suicide - real stories"](#) Key words- university, anyone, silence. life and soul, loss. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJ4BMrxflLA>

[zerosuicidealliance.com](https://www.zerosuicidealliance.com)- Key words- real stories, free training, conversation

[What is SToRMS?](#) <https://www.facebook.com/TheDanMcAllisterFoundation/videos/1763382643977088>