



Support your mate

Mates are there for each other in good times and the bad.

Being there for a mate in the good times is usually easy and fun. But when a mate goes through a rough patch it can be hard to know what to do or say.

This can be especially challenging if your mate is having not just a bad day, but experiencing a mental health difficulty.

Mental health first aid

The good news is there are some simple steps you can take to look after your mates — regardless of what challenges they may be facing.

You can apply mental health first aid yourself. The acronym REACT may help you remember the five steps:

Recognise the symptoms of mental health difficulties

One of the easiest ways to do this is to know your mates well — any change in their usual behaviour is often the first sign of a mental health problem. Other symptoms of mental health difficulties can include:

- physical reactions like nausea, sweating, or shaking
- thinking reactions like poor concentration or negativity
- behavioural changes like disrupted sleep, excessive drinking/smoking, or increased aggression
- emotional reactions like sadness, anger, or anxiety.

Engage the person

After you have recognised any of the symptoms, engage with your mate.

Talk to them — for example, you might say “I’ve noticed X, Y and Z, are you ok?”

Have this conversation in a private environment if possible. Just be yourself and listen to them.

Actively listen

Once you have engaged with your mate, you need to actively listen. Active listening involves both hearing and accurately understanding what the speaker has said. Your job during this step is to listen to your mate and reflect back on what you are hearing and clarify any differences.

For example — “so it sounds like you’re feeling angry because of XYZ, am I right?”

Allow your mate time to vent if need be and don't be afraid to allow some silence in your conversation — sometimes people need silence in order to think. This is not the time to argue with them or tell them you know how they feel, or try to solve their problems. Simply listen, reflect, and clarify.

Check suicide risk and risk of harm to others

If after engaging and actively listening you are at all concerned that your mate is at risk of suicide, self-harm or harm to other people, you need to ask them about it directly.

You might ask your mate “Have you been thinking about suicide?”

Take action

If they are considering suicide or self-harm, they must be taken to a doctor for assessment.

If they are considering harming others, the police need to be involved.

In both cases, you need to remove any threats, such as firearms, when and where it's safe to do so. You should never agree to keep secrets or leave them alone if they are in crisis.

If your mate isn't suicidal or homicidal and you're no longer concerned about their mental health, you might choose to simply monitor them. However, if you think they would benefit from support, help them take the next step to see some professional advice and care.

Access mental health treatment (<https://www.veteransaffairs.mil.nz/a-z/mental-health-treatment/>)