

## It's Okay to Not Be Okay

A simple “hello” is usually followed by “how are you?” or “how have you been?” – and most of the time the answer is “good” or “fine.” But what if you’re struggling? Here are some things you can say when you’re not okay.

### WHAT TO SAY WHEN YOU'RE *NOT* FINE

I'm not fine	I want to talk about it	I don't want to talk about it
I'm actually going through some stuff.	Do you have some time to chat later?	Thanks for asking, but I don't feel like going into detail.
Thanks for asking. _____ has been stressing me out lately.	Have you ever felt like _____?	I'm not in the talking mood, but I'll reach out when I'm ready.
I can't stop thinking about _____.	I'd love to get your advice on something.	I'm still trying to find the right words.
Not so great, to be honest.	I need to vent.	I don't feel like talking, but I'll take a hug.
It's been one of those days/weeks.	Do you have time to listen?	Let's talk about something else instead for now.

### WHAT TO SAY WHEN SOMEONE *TELLS* YOU THEY'RE FINE, BUT THEY'RE NOT

*Fine. Okay. Alright.* We've all had someone tell us they were one of these things and known that it couldn't be further from the truth. Maybe it was the look on their face, the tone of their voice, or their body language that gave them away—or maybe you've noticed that they've been acting differently lately.

While what you say will likely be different depending on how well you know the person, here are some ideas for things to say to create an environment that encourages someone to open up about what they're going through.

- “Are you sure? If you want to talk, let me know.”
- “It seems like something is bothering you. I'm here to listen if you want to share.”
- “I've been ‘fine’ before – I'm here if you want to talk about it.”
- “Do you want to (get coffee/go to lunch/grab a bite/take a walk) later? I feel like we have a lot to catch up on.”
- “That wasn't very convincing – I'm here if you want to chat.”

## SOMEONE IS OPENING UP TO YOU. NOW WHAT?

### DO...

- **Listen.** Really listening means actively paying attention to the person and resisting the urge to talk about personal experiences unless asked.
- **Ask if they've thought about what they might need to feel better.** If they haven't, offer to support, listen, and talk it out with them. If they have, support them in following through with their needs.
- **Make sure to keep things confidential** unless it is life threatening.
- **Normalize.** Assure the person you're talking to that having a mental health concern is common, and there are lots of resources to help them feel better.
- **Prepare to follow up.** Exchange contact information (if you don't have it already) and touch base in a few days to see how the person is feeling and if there is anything you can do to help. You may want to research some resources like websites, hotlines, text lines, and community organizations so you can be prepared to offer them if it seems appropriate.

### DON'T...

- Tell them, "You shouldn't think that way." It can be difficult to have conversations about mental health, and they may have worried about it for some time before talking to you.
- Use the word "crazy."
- Tell someone what they *should* do; instead, ask what they want you to help them with.
- Assume that they want your advice. Many times, people just want someone else to listen.
- Make comparisons. Telling someone, "It could be worse" minimizes their experience.
- Try to fix the person's problems. Offer help where appropriate, but don't get into a trap of trying to solve the problem, especially if it seems like a professional should be involved.

Remember, **Johns Hopkins Employee Assistance Program (JHEAP)** can help you and those you care about connect to professional counseling for any issue that's on your mind. Access is free, confidential, and 24/7.

ACCESS LINE: **888-978-1262** | WEBSITE: [myccaonline.com](http://myccaonline.com)  
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