



Older adults opening up about anxiety and depression

For some older people, talking about personal matters does not come easy.

Some older people have never really talked about how they feel; it wasn't the thing to do when they were growing up. Others worry about what will happen as a result of sharing their experiences; they do not want to be seen as a burden and they don't want to be treated differently. Some also worry that asking for help might be seen as a weakness. But the reality is that the community and its understanding of mental health issues has come a long way. By having a conversation about your anxiety or depression, it helps those around you to better understand and support you.

"Humans are social beings. We're meant to share our lives, we're meant to talk."

- Brian

Get ready to talk

Many older people find talking about how they feel really helpful. But it's not always easy so it is important to make this decision knowing what you want to share, why and who the right person is to talk with. If you decide to share your experiences, start the conversation in a way that is comfortable to you. Choose a place that you find calm and quiet, or bring it up when you're on an outing. Whatever works best for you.

Having the conversation will allow you to:

- share the load or increase others understanding about what you're feeling
- explain why you're acting differently or not doing things you used to do
- request support
- ask for ideas
- help maintain close relationships.

Things you could say

- "I know you have been worried about me. I am getting help from my doctor. I hope you will be patient as I get myself back on track."
- "I have been struggling with depression over the last few months and I just can't seem to get everything done like I used to – would you be able to help out a little while I get back on my feet?"
- "I'm not going too well. I've never felt this low. What do you think I ought to do about it?"
- "I just don't have the energy at the moment for being as social as we were... I hope you will be patient with me. I am trying."



Find the right person

Who you confide in is up to you but it is important to talk with someone you trust and feel comfortable with. If it's your first conversation, think about who will be most understanding and helpful. It might be a close friend, family member or someone you know who has also experienced depression or anxiety.

- Think about who you will tell and what you might tell them. You might tell some people that you have an issue and are dealing with it, while you might give others more detail about how long you have been unwell and what you are doing to recover.

- Think about what type of help you need and who could provide this.
- You might want to approach some people individually but you might tell others, for example your family, when they are all together.
- Talk about how you will share information during your recovery. You don't want to feel like you have to talk to everyone about everything.

"We don't get through life on our own."

- Claire

What if I don't feel I have anyone to talk to?

- Think about the groups activities you are involved in. There might be someone you could approach that you think would understand.
- Talk to your local doctor. They can help you to identify other support options.
- Call the *beyondblue* Support Service on **1300 22 4636**.
- Think about the people around you. Is there someone who has shown you support before? Consider whether you could begin to talk with them about how you feel and gauge their response.

Find the words

Getting started can seem a little daunting. If you are not ready to talk, think about beginning the conversation in other ways. You might start by writing a letter, or perhaps asking someone else to help you to explain things. Or you might ask someone to read some information about your condition before you see them next.

If you are ready to have the conversation then it is best to just get started and see where the conversation takes you. You might be surprised by the reaction that you receive. You might also find that you feel emotional when talking about your experiences; but that's OK. By accepting and sharing your own feelings it may help the other person to be more accepting of the situation too.



"Keeping it inside me nearly drove me into the ground – when I talked I improved markedly."

- Claire

Help them understand

You don't have to have all the answers – it is about sharing how you feel, how it is affecting you and what you plan to do about it.

Things you could say

- "I would really like to talk with you about this. Maybe we can talk after you have read this information?"
- "I've been pretending things are going okay, but I'm actually feeling very low and not coping lately."
- "I might get upset talking to you about this, but I just want to let you know that I have depression."
- "I'd like to explain why I've been withdrawing from everyone lately. It's because I'm not feeling well."
- "Can we just sit down and talk a little about what my doctor said last time I saw her?"

- Say things your way – whatever feels comfortable. Ensure you talk about what is important to you.
- Describe how you have been feeling and how depression and anxiety have affected you.
- Remind them that feeling grumpy and irritable is not just a normal part of ageing.



- Ask them if they have noticed any changes.
- Provide them with information as you talk, or refer them to useful websites so they can learn more.
- Encourage them to ask questions – but not too many.
- Remind them that there is more to you than this problem. You are still their grandparent, parent, partner, sibling or friend. You don't want to be talking about it all the time, but you don't want them to be fearful of talking to you about it either. It's all about balance.
- Be clear about your privacy. Sometimes it can be helpful to offer a gentle reminder that you would like your privacy respected.

Things you could say

- "This isn't easy for me to talk about... I will do my best to explain."
- "It's like not being able to see any colours, just grey."
- "I am feeling tired and irritable all the time."
- "I just feel numb, no emotions at all, just blank."
- "I have had hard times in the past but this... I just don't experience any happy moments."
- "It's like having a 'fuzzy brain' or a 'fog' in the head. I just can't do the simplest things."
- "I have never been so tired... I have lost every ounce of energy and I can never seem to get enough sleep to feel any better."
- "What have you noticed?"

It can be helpful to prepare yourself for a range of reactions and accept that it may take time for some people to fully understand what you're going through. It might take some people time to process what you've told them and their initial response might not be a good indicator of the ongoing support they could provide.

What if I get a bad reaction?

- Point out their reaction: "You seem shocked" or "I notice you changed the subject quickly back then". Talk with them about this. They may not know what to say or do, or they may have no prior understanding of anxiety or depression.
- Let them know that you'd like their support.
- Accept that it may take time for them to fully understand what you are going through.
- Consider giving them some information (e.g. a *beyondblue* brochure) about anxiety or depression.
- Accept that you may not be able to change their attitude.

"Start anywhere. The process of talking helps..."

- Neil

Talking about your experiences of anxiety and/or depression can be exhausting so plan to do enjoyable or relaxing things after these conversations. It might be something on your own – listening to music, getting busy with a project – or maybe something with your family – going for a walk, playing a game of cards, etc.

Talk about what is comfortable

Think about what you are comfortable talking about. If talking about how you feel is difficult, focus on how the anxiety or depression has affected what you do, what you enjoy and perhaps even some of the physical symptoms; a lack of energy, no interest in food or trouble sleeping.

- If you begin to feel distressed, uncomfortable or unsupported then consider ending the conversation.
- Don't be afraid to laugh, cry or express how you feel.
- Other issues may arise when you sit and talk with those you care about. Try not to let these interfere with your conversation. You may need to separate issues or suggest that other things are talked about later.

Work out what help you need

By asking for help you are acknowledging that things are not how you want them to be and that others might be able to help you improve your situation. It is not about giving up your independence and autonomy; it's about finding a supportive group of people to help you through a tough time in a way that works for you.

People can help you in a range of ways – emotionally (being available to listen, offering reassurance) and practically (help with house duties or driving to weekly outings).

- Talk with people about what helps and what makes things more difficult.
- Be clear about what you would appreciate help with (e.g. getting to appointments, doing household chores, getting around the golf course, visiting regularly).
- Don't leave out the simple things, like spending quality time with family

or friends. Sometimes the simple things help more than people realise.

- Not everyone will be able or willing to support you as you had hoped and at those times you might simply need to appreciate their efforts.

Things you could say

- "It would really help if you could help me with my shopping for a few weeks. Getting out has got a bit difficult for me."
- "Are you sure you have enough time? Well then thank you, it would be great if you could come over for lunch."
- "I think it would help if I got back into my car project – would you be willing to help me. I don't think I have the patience I used to have."
- "Thank you for your kind offer but I think I am OK for now. I appreciate your concern."



Talking is the way out

Recovering from depression and anxiety can take time so it is likely that you will have many more conversations about how you feel and how your recovery is going. Enter into these conversations in the same way – talk when you are comfortable to do so, ask for help when you need it, and let others support you. You do not have to recover alone and you can make choices about how and when people support your recovery. Find the right people, find the right words, and let others help you through your recovery.

“You’ve got to be brave and take a risk... life can only get better.”

- Brian



Talking about how you feel with others

- Consider why you want to talk to others.
- Think about what you want to say, how and to whom.
- Say things your way.
- Help them understand your perspective.
- Give them information to help them to learn more.
- Remind them that this is only one part of your life; you do want to talk about others things too.
- Help them understand how they can help.
- Remember that you do not have to face this alone.



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Where to find more information

beyondblue

www.beyondblue.org.au

Learn more about anxiety and depression, or talk it through with our Support Service.

☎ 1300 22 4636

✉ Email or 💬 chat to us online at www.beyondblue.org.au/getsupport

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