

#WEARELISTENING

Talking about mental health: *The cracks and slips*

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The silence around mental health issues is compounded by misconceptions. Unless we're aware of what they are and how they manifest in our everyday interactions, we cannot give our loved ones the support they need. Take a look at some of the ways we tend to talk about mental health problems - and ways we could improve our attitudes towards them.

IGNORING A WARNING SIGN

Messages	Zaafir	Contact
	Mahir missed class again. Is he okay?	
	He barely talks now. I saw scars on his wrist, what is he even thinking? He's way too emotional.	
	We need to talk to him. ASAP. This is probably a cry for help.	
	Chill. Let's play some football tomorrow, it should get his mind off his problems.	
	Not your best idea, man. We're friends, he should feel comfortable talking to us. This is how we show him we're there for him.	

Does talking about self-harm make matters worse? If these conversations are avoided, people who are suffering will be even more reluctant to talk about what they are going through. Asking if someone is having suicidal thoughts doesn't increase their risk for acting on them, contrary to a commonly held belief. If you know someone who may be considering self-harm, talk to him or her immediately - before it's too late. Help them find support and do your best to keep them safe.

TRIVIALISING A DISORDER

Messages	Maisha	Contact
	Ma cleaned my room and didn't even colour coordinate my closet. I'm totally having OCD right now.	
	You know OCD is a lot more than wanting your closet colour coordinated right?	
	Um, repeatedly washing hands? You know what I meant. I like my room organised.	
	But it's not a joke. Living with OCD means always fighting harmful thoughts and it makes each day feel like hell. I wish you'd stop using the term so casually.	

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) has become so common that we forget about the disorder itself. Many believe OCD to be a personality quirk. People with OCD can have their lives turned upside down on a regular basis due to obsessive thoughts that they cannot always control.

MISUNDERSTANDING SOMEONE IN DISTRESS

Messages	Ali	Contact
	I know Lamia is sad, but that doesn't mean she can't do her part of the project. That's just being lazy.	
	Dude cut her some slack. She's depressed. It's not like she can control it.	
	Yeah, but she needs to snap out of it. She's going to fail and take us down too.	
	What she needs is some help. Possibly a therapist. It's the brain chemicals going berserk. She isn't choosing to be down or tired.	
	Plus, if we split up the work it could easily be managed. Let's go see her after school.	

We often confuse depression with sadness. While we all feel bouts of sadness every now and then, depression is a prolonged feeling of emptiness - almost as if all the energy was drained out of us. It's being unable to get out of bed and doing everyday activities, and enjoying things which make us happy. What we shouldn't forget is that sadness is a common emotion - everyone feels it at some time or another. But depression is an illness. One that has physiological connotations and one which may require medical help.

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING

Messages	Shahriar	Contact
	Hey, thanks for coming out yesterday. It's been a while since I got to talk to someone	
	Not a problem! You feeling better?	
	Lighter than yesterday.	
	Look I might not know what you're going through, but I'm a call away if you need to decompress	
	Yeah I know. Thank you for listening :)	

The power of having a good listener in our lives cannot be overstated. They may not be experts at solving the struggles that we face, but they are willing to hear us out, even if it is for the sole purpose to let us vent.



Let's stand by our loved ones when we sense that they are going through difficult times. Sometimes the most important step towards healing is having someone who listens and understands.

This article is part of a series for an ongoing campaign on mental health #ThankYouForListening, led by BRAC. The authors work at BRAC Communications.