

I'M HURTING:

HOW DO I TELL MY PARENTS?

If you're hurting or think you may be struggling with something like depression or an anxiety disorder, talking to your parents to get help is a good idea. But it's also kind of terrifying – how will they react? What will they say? Will they believe you or assume it's just a phase?

It is perfectly normal to be afraid to have this conversation. There are a lot of unknowns, and you're hurting enough already. However, talking with your parents is the first step in taking ownership of your health and well-being as they are in the best position to help you connected to the resources you need.

Here are a few tips to hopefully make the conversation easier:

1 BE PREPARED FOR QUESTIONS

Telling your parents that you think you might need to see a doctor or counselor will probably make them ask a lot of questions like “Why?” “What’s wrong?” “What do you mean?” “How do you feel?” and “What’s upsetting you?”. These questions can be frustrating because there may not be a good answer. Sometimes something IS wrong – a breakup, bad grades, friends shutting you out, etc. – but sometimes feelings are just there for no reason. Try to anticipate some of their questions and be prepared to answer them as best you can. If you can't answer a question, you can say that too – *“I don't know why I feel this way, that's why I think I need to talk to a professional to help me figure it out.”*

2 MAKE TIME FOR THE CONVERSATION

Telling your parents that you're depressed or anxious 5 seconds before getting on the school bus probably isn't the best strategy. Tell them you need to talk to them after dinner or before bed, or a different time when you know they will actually sit and listen to you. If this is difficult, try to “trap” them in a car ride where they can't escape. A nice bonus is that in the car, they will be focused on the road, so you don't have to make awkward eye contact when you talk about how you're feeling.

3 COMMIT!

If your parents don't react the way you wanted to, don't back down! Changing your mind, backtracking, or lying is going to give your parents another reason not to believe you. Be 100% honest with your parents so that they don't doubt for a second what you're saying or how serious it is.

4 WRITE A LETTER

Sometimes verbalizing what's happening to you and how you're feeling is too hard, and that's OK. Many people find that writing a letter to their parents is easier because they have more time to think through their words and edit the letter to best reflect how they are feeling.

5 REMEMBER THAT THEY WANT TO HELP YOU!

It's easy to forget that your parents have taken care of you your whole life. They have spent countless hours, time, and energy helping you to get to where you are today, and they want to know if something is wrong and they can help. Parents are often the last to realize that something isn't right with their child and they often feel terrible that they didn't realize it sooner. Tell them now, *they want to know*.

6 WHAT IF IT DOESN'T WORK?

Even if your parents are not willing to talk to you, or if they don't take you seriously, it's still worth the effort to try. People are often surprised at how much their parents really do support them when they finally ask for help. However, if the talk doesn't go well, know that you have other options. You can talk to your school counselor and explain what happened and they can act as a third party advocate to help explain to your parents how serious your feelings are. If that doesn't work, you can also look into getting help and assistance without your parents – different states have different laws regarding when a minor has a legal right to confidentiality and can consent to mental health treatment.