

# Tips for Teens & Young Adults Supporting Friends



As a young person, if you find yourself providing ongoing emotional support to a friend struggling with a mental health challenge, here are some tips to help you manage the situation.

1. **Establish your role, goals, and limitations early.** Make the decision early on about whether you are willing to provide peer support. It's hard to say no, but it is your choice. If you agree to help, even for a seemingly minor matter, it's important to have an initial conversation about what you can and can't do. You can say you are happy to listen, and provide support and advice, as a friend. But they also need to know:

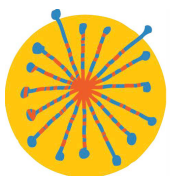
- You are not a mental health professional, so you cannot provide advice for situations that require years of training.
- You cannot be the only person providing help, as it is too much responsibility for you to carry alone.
- Perhaps most importantly, you may need to call someone else – a parent, teacher, or doctor – if you feel your friend is in danger. You cannot ensure absolute confidentiality.

These preliminary talks are essential. They prevent misunderstandings or your friend feeling betrayed. And, if you need to bring in others, you will have this agreement from the outset.

2. **Don't worry alone.** While your friend may only want to talk with you about the situation, it's not helpful or healthy for you – or for them – to carry the full weight of emotional support. In the beginning, you ask whom else you can bring into the situation. This may be another friend, a teacher, parent, or a counselor. Setting up a small team is a great way to prevent feeling that the entire burden of assistance rests on your shoulders.

3. **Take care of yourself.** You need to put on your own life-mask first before helping the person next to you, as the airplane announcement goes. We can only help others if we're in a good emotional place and can think clearly. If you need self-care ideas, take a look at what other teens and young adults do on our self-care page.

There's nothing better than being able to help a friend in need, but thinking things through in advance can go a long way to helping yourself, as well.



The Clay Center for  
Young Healthy Minds

*Shining light on mental health through education.*

[mghclaycenter.org](http://mghclaycenter.org)