

## 9 WAYS TO HELP A FRIEND WITH ANXIETY

**If you have a friend, partner or loved one who struggles with anxiety, it can be challenging to know what to say and how to show up.**

Here are a few ways to be a good friend to someone with anxiety:

### **Listen deeply and compassionately**

Ask your friend how they are, then listen with your full body and without thinking of how you'll respond. Practice being totally present. Acknowledge their feelings. Avoid pat phrases like *"you'll get through this"* or *"you're okay"*. Thank them for sharing them with you.

### **Don't try to fix them**

No one is broken. And your friend has likely already done a lot of research and experimentation to understand their anxiety that having to field more well-meaning suggestions may feel like an extra burden, and possibly like they are seen as a problem.

Your friend has been surviving the debilitating effects of anxiety; they are strong and courageous for facing as much as they do. Celebrate the personal victories when you know they've done something especially hard.

### **Let the anxiety be**

It may seem counter-intuitive, but let your friend know they can be anxious with you, that you understand anxiety isn't something they are choosing, and that you won't try to talk them out of their feelings.

### **Ask your friend what they need**

Different people with anxiety have different ways of managing. Meditation and breathing exercises, for instance, are helpful for a lot of people — and may be helpful for you — but they may not help your friend. Some people with anxiety need to do something active, like a run or aerobics. Ask your friend what works for them and how you can help.

### **Keep them company**

In addition to the overwhelm of anxiety comes the overwhelm of trying to get the right support. Your friend may try different movement classes, therapies, doctors, or meditation practices. Offer to do something with them! It's less daunting with company.

 0800 SELF HELP (0800 735 343)

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### **Understand that anxiety looks different on everyone**

Anxiety can manifest as a deep tiredness and can also cause sleeplessness. It can be experienced as restlessness, agitation, and an inability to concentrate. It causes irritability for some, and irrational fears for others. Anxiety can also be experienced as frightening chest pains and uncomfortable muscle tension. The diverse and sometimes misunderstood symptoms of anxiety are real. Let your friend know you care and want to know about their experience.

### **Check in regularly**

If your friend seems anxious when you're together, check in, *"Hey, are you feeling anxious right now?"* In asking, you let them know that with you there's always space for their anxiety, it doesn't need to be avoided, and they're not a burden. *"Is there something we could do that would help?"* Sometimes in the midst of panic, it may be hard for your friend to know what would help. If they aren't sure, you might offer to go somewhere quiet together or take a walk.

### **Be aware of your impact**

If you're going to be late, let them know. Or if you don't have time to reply to an email or text, give a quick explanation so your friend isn't left to worry. Anxiety can be an inner-bully; it can convince people they are burdensome. Make a conscious effort to reassure your anxious friend. A simple *"I love spending time with you"* (and not just when they're calm) means a lot.

### **Hold your own boundaries**

Remember that it is important to take care of yourself too! Your friend is likely to feel guilty if they think their anxiety is keeping you from doing what you want. So, don't let it. Do the things you want to do and let your friend know they can trust you to take care of your social and emotional needs. When they are asking for more than you have to give, let them know. *"I love you. I can't talk now, but let's have a virtual coffee date at 2 tomorrow."*

**Remember EAPworks is here to help**

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