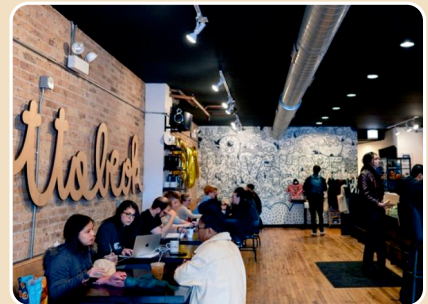




An initiative from
**Department of Mental Health Education
and
Augmenta Health**

OPEN SPACES OPEN MINDS

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR PROMOTING
MENTAL HEALTH CONVERSATIONS IN PUBLIC SPACES



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In every shared space, we plant seeds of care-conversations bloom everywhere

Create a Welcoming Space

- **Be Welcoming:** Use open body language, friendly eye contact, and a warm smile to create an inviting atmosphere for meaningful mental health conversations in any public setting.
- **Bring Comfort:** Consider sensory elements like soft lighting, cozy seating, or subtle fragrances to create a calming, comfortable space that encourages relaxed conversation.
- **Bold Signage:** Use inclusive, visible signage with messages like "Let's Talk" or "Here to Listen" to gently invite others to engage in conversation.
- **Bridge Cultures:** Show cultural sensitivity by incorporating local languages, symbols, and culturally inclusive visuals, ensuring people feel respected and connected.



Start with General, Open-Ended Questions

- **Keep It Light:** Begin with casual questions like, "How's your day going?" to gauge comfort levels without pressure.
- **Ask Neutral Questions:** Gradually move to questions like, "What are your thoughts on mental health conversations in public spaces?" to open up dialogue naturally.

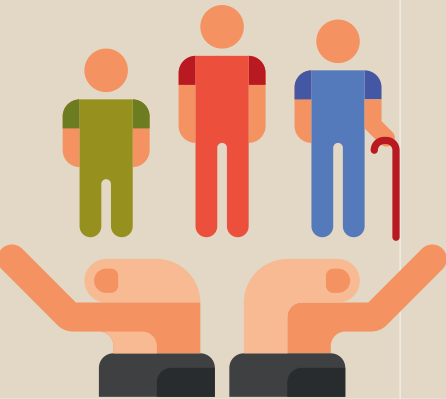


Promote a Non-Judgmental, Confidential Space

- **Validate Feelings:** Use active listening and empathy by responding with phrases like "I appreciate you sharing that" to foster trust.
- **Respect Privacy:** Provide physical distance when possible to respect comfort levels in public spaces.
- **Limit Personal Opinions:** Offer space for the other person to express their experiences rather than giving personal views.



Curate your conversations



- **For the younger:** Use age-appropriate language and creative tools like drawing or emotion cards to encourage expression. Speak softly and get down to their level.
- **For the elder:** Use respectful language, asking questions like, "What strategies have helped you cope in the past?" to honor their experiences.
- **For everyone between:** Keep questions open-ended but simple, like "What's on your mind today?" Offer relatable support and focus on their experiences.

Foster Connection & Communication



- **Create a Safe Group Atmosphere:** Lead group activities like gratitude-sharing circles or story-sharing, keeping the tone light and inclusive to normalize mental health conversations.
- **Focus on Shared Experiences:** Discuss everyday stresses like work-life balance or family dynamics to build relatability across all ages.

Be mindful of Language



- **Avoid stigmatizing words:** Choose non-judgmental phrases, like "facing challenges" instead of "troubled person."
- **Show Empathy, Not Sympathy:** Use caring responses like "I'm here for you" to foster support, not isolation.
- **Listen Actively:** Focus fully on their words, reflecting back with statements like, "It sounds like you've been through a lot."
- **Use Inclusive Language:** Choose welcoming, assumption-free language, such as "partner" instead of specific labels, to ensure everyone feels respected and understood.



Ensure Safety and Respect for Diversity

- **Create an Inclusive Environment:** Be mindful of diverse perspectives and avoid assumptions based on religion, orientation, or background.
- **Seek Consent:** Respect personal boundaries by checking if the other person is comfortable before delving deeper into mental health topics.



Make it About Wellness, Not Illness

- **Promote Wellness:** Emphasize coping, resilience, and mental wellness over specific issues, focusing on daily well-being practices.
- **Use Positive Framing:** Discuss benefits like improved relationships and well-being, inviting everyone to feel comfortable discussing mental health.



Resource Sharing and Follow-Up Support

- **Provide Information:** Share accessible resources, such as helpline numbers or community support details, for those seeking further help.
- **Offer Self-Help Tools:** Give practical tools like mindfulness exercises or grounding techniques that people can try independently.
- **Encourage Peer Support:** Empower individuals to approach friends or family with mental health challenges, promoting a ripple effect of positive conversations.





Offer the Option to Disengage

- **Respect Boundaries:** Give the option to disengage by saying, "You're free to share only as much as you feel comfortable."
- **Observe Nonverbal Cues:** Respect signs of discomfort, like lack of eye contact, and allow them to step back without judgment.
- **Avoid Multitasking During Conversations:** When engaged in a mental health discussion, keep phone usage minimal and respectful. If you need to use your phone (for sharing resources, for example), briefly explain why to show you're still present and attentive.

Handling a Mental Health Crisis



- **Identify Signs of Crisis:** Signs may include intense emotional distress, expressions of hopelessness, or talk of self-harm. Notice physical cues like crying, withdrawal, or agitation.
- **Approach Calmly and Empathetically:** Maintain a steady, calm voice, validate their feelings, and offer assurance, such as "I'm here to help, and we'll work through this together."
- **Provide Immediate Help:** If the situation escalates, calmly suggest involving a mental health professional or local crisis team. Offer to be with them or call someone they trust if appropriate.
- **Know Local Crisis Resources:** Keep contacts of mental health helplines, emergency services, and community mental health support teams to refer to in case of emergencies.

