

Everything Wellbeing 🌱 : How to Support a Colleague Opening Up About Mental Health

🕒 Reading Time: 4 Minutes

Dear Resident Doctors,

Welcome back to *Everything Wellbeing*! 🙌

Recently, at a Regional Training Day, a colleague suggested something that really stuck with me:

"It would be so useful to have a simple guide for when someone opens up to you about their mental health."

I thought, what a brilliant idea. So here we are.

In Medicine, we work in teams. Sometimes, a colleague going through a tough time may turn to you. They might share their struggles, or if you're in a senior role, they may look to you for support and guidance.

But when that moment happens, it can feel overwhelming.

What do you say?

How do you help without making things awkward or worse?

Here's the good news:

You don't need to be a mental health expert. You don't need to fix everything.

You just need to know how to *be there*.

Here are some simple, practical steps for when a colleague opens up to you. 💬 🙌

1. Well Done - for Them, and for You 🙌

Opening up about mental health takes real courage. If someone comes to you, it's because they see you as kind, empathetic, and trustworthy. That's a huge compliment. Recognise how hard it might have been for them to start this conversation. Be gentle, stay calm, and just *be present*. Your kindness can mean more than you realise.

2. Listen - Really Listen 🙌

When someone shares their struggles, they're not expecting you to "fix" them. They just want to feel *heard*. Let them talk. Try not to interrupt or jump in. Sometimes, just being able to vent in a safe space is the most helpful thing you can offer.

3. Find the Right Time and Place 🕒 🏠

The middle of a ward round or an ED shift isn't ideal for deep conversations. If possible, move to a quieter, private space.

If that's not feasible, offer to catch up later, maybe over coffee or a phone chat. The key is to create a safe environment where they feel comfortable opening up.

4. Honour Their Trust 🤝

If someone shares something personal with you, that's a sign of deep trust. Reassure them that what they've shared will stay confidential.

The only exception is if there are serious safety concerns. Otherwise, their trust is in your hands; keep it safe.

5. Remind Them They Are Not Alone 😊

When you're struggling, it can feel like you're the only one. Spoiler alert: *you're not*.

Many doctors face mental health challenges during their careers. Remind your colleague that it's normal to have tough times. It's brave to open up and ask for help. They are not alone in this.

6. Signpost to Supervisors 📌

Encourage them to speak with their Educational or Clinical Supervisor. Supervisors can provide structured support like flexible working, workload adjustments, or extra mentoring that we, as peers, can't.

It might feel intimidating to bring it up, but a good supervisor will want to help them succeed and thrive. Your encouragement can make that first step easier.

7. Point Them Towards PSW 🌐

Don't forget about the Professional Support and Wellbeing (PSW) service. PSW offers confidential support for doctors in training, coaching, mentoring, wellbeing resources, and more. Their website is packed with helpful tools and links.

Also, the *Everything Wellbeing* blog (this one!) is featured on the PSW site, which could give them extra support during tough times.

8. Encourage Professional Medical Help 🏥

If they're struggling, gently suggest they speak to their GP. Seeking professional help, whether it's counselling, therapy, or other interventions, is a proactive and strong step.

It's important to normalise this.
It's not a sign of weakness; it's self-care.

9. Keep in Touch and Be Non-Judgmental 🧩

One of the most valuable things you can do?
Stay in touch.

A simple message like, **“Just wanted to check in and make sure you are doing ok !”**
can mean so much.

Be approachable. Be non-judgmental. Sometimes, just knowing someone cares is the most powerful support of all.

💭 Final Thoughts

Since starting this blog and my role as a Wellbeing Fellow, a few resident doctor colleagues have approached me with their own mental health struggles. Every time, I try to be the ***person I wish I had to speak to and seek support when I was going through a tough time.***

Sometimes, being that supportive person, a guide, a mentor, or just someone who listens, can have a profound impact on a colleague's journey.

So be kind. Be compassionate. Listen.

We all chose this profession because we wanted to make a positive difference.

Let's make sure that we include *each other*.

Let's break the stigma and make it okay to ask for help. 💙

And as always

Take great care of yourselves, so you can take great care of others.

Warm Regards,




Junaid

Your Friendly Neighbourhood Wellbeing Fellow

💬 As always, I'd love your feedback to help improve this blog for you:
[Feedback Form](#)

Resources:

Here are some resources that you can signpost to

-  [Everything Wellbeing Blog](#)
-  [PSW Wellbeing Support Services](#)
-  [You Okay, Doc? – Resources](#)