

Taking Conversations Beyond “I’m Fine”

One of the most common responses you may hear from a family member when asking how they are doing is, “I’m fine” or “I’m good.” This vague answer is often an easy response to brush off how someone is really feeling. Here are a few tips to break-through the “I’m fine” wall and start a genuine conversation.

ASK AGAIN

When you get the generic “I’m fine” answer, simply repeat your question or respond with “tell me more.” This gives the individual another opening to share how they feel and not brush it off. It may take that extra push for them to speak up and it shows them that you really care. You can also use a feelings chart like the one on the right where they choose which area their feelings are sitting that day.

CHANGE THE QUESTION

Instead of saying “How are you?” or “How was your day?” get more creative in your question. For example, “What was the best part of your day?” or “If you were able to change something about today what would it be?” This again opens the floor for a more thoughtful response that indicates how their day is going.

OPEN WITH AN OBSERVATION

Start the conversation with an observation about a change in their mood or behavior such as “I noticed you aren’t quite as talkative as usual. Is everything okay?” This approach shows that you care and are concerned, without making assumptions about what may be happening.

MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE

If it is clear the individual is not interested in more conversation, be sure to let them know “I’m here if you need me” or “I am happy to talk anytime.” When the time is right, they will know you are a safe place to turn.

BE DIRECT

If this is a situation where the person has experienced mental illness in the past, be kind, yet direct. This approach lets you address the issue first, which can help the other person if they are hesitant to bring it forward. For example, “I know it’s difficult to lose a friend, but I’m here for you if you want to talk.”

HOW ARE YOU FEELING?

HAPPY

- Hopeful
- Creative
- Cheerful
- Energetic
- Excited



CALM

- Trusting
- Peaceful
- Relaxed
- Thoughtful
- Satisfied



SAD

- Tired
- Bored
- Lonely
- Depressed
- Guilty



SCARED

- Anxious
- Helpless
- Insecure
- Embarrassed
- Confused



MAD

- Hurt
- Angry
- Annoyed
- Jealous
- Frustrated

