

Tips from Us

(tips from youth on how to support youth diagnosed with mental illness)

- **Have a talk. Don't make it awkward.**
- **Ask more questions but subtly.**
- **Teachers, adults, counselors, doctors, parents (etc.) make a HUGE difference**
- **Be youth friendly & know something about youth culture.**
 - Know our name and know about our lives and experiences (without staring at our file). Use pictures to show us how something works. Go to Facebook. Use podcasts. Create a website. Put things in your class like games and magazines to help us feel comfortable and to show us you know something about what we like to do.
- **Listen to us because we typically don't feel heard.**
 - Ask us about what we want and how we like to communicate. We may not say too much because we don't know if we can trust you. Spend more time with us. We don't want to feel like we are just another student. Be careful about your reaction if we say or do something that you don't like. We won't always say what you want to hear. Try to be understanding. Show us that what we say matters to you.
- **Learn how to talk to us.**
 - Inform us. We want to know what is happening to us. Encourage us. Show us that you want to help. We have the right to information, too. Share sympathy for our specific situation and help us cope. Don't point fingers. Have a conversation. Use words we understand, not jargon. We can tell a lot from your tone and how you look at us, not just from what you say. Be specific and to the point when you talk to us. Tell us about how we can get better. Share success stories with us so that we don't feel like we are the only ones going through this.
- **We know us.**
 - Don't always believe the adult over us. Don't over-diagnose, or stereotype us. We are self-aware. Sometimes it's not just us, it's our environment. Our diagnosis is not who we are.
- **Inform our parents but maintain our confidentiality.**
 - Nobody wants their child to be labeled as crazy, or a troublemaker. Tell our parents about school and community supports. Explain things to our parents and make sure that they understand and can ask questions. You can give them hope. Remember we are your students. You are not our parents.

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- **Discuss alternatives.**
 - Teach us coping skills, or study tricks. Join with us. We need you to be part of our team.
- **Understand that we are likely to be afraid.**
 - We are afraid of what you will hear and what you will think. We worry about being sent straight to the principal when we see you, or being singled out in the classroom in front of our friends and peers. We are afraid of attention and having too much unwanted/negative attention.
- **Recognize that we may be frustrated.**
 - We have problems. Take the time to find out more about our issues. Give us hope. Help us succeed.
- **We want choices. Give us options.**
 - Don't just tell us what to do. Help us manage our own lives. Tell us about other respected providers in case we want a second opinion. Tell us about our legal rights and when we can decide on our own about treatment. Tell us about what kind of treatment we are receiving.
- **We have a voice. We have the right to choose.**
 - Tell us more. We deserve respect. How would you want your child to be treated?