

Dealing with Sadness and Anger

When you ask, “R U OK?”, you may be met with a strong emotional reaction. Before you can have a rational conversation with someone who is struggling, you must first address their emotions. Below are some tips on how to handle sadness and anger.

Sadness

- Use lots of empathetic phrases, such as “It sounds like you have a lot going on in your life” or “I understand this must be challenging for you right now.”
- Ensure the best internal support is available, such as the EAP.
- Make sure you’re comfortable with any silence in the conversation; know that silence gives them permission to add more and to tell you everything.
- If someone begins to cry, sit quietly and allow them to cry. Lowering your eyes can minimize their discomfort. You could add, “I’m going to sit here with you and when you’re ready we can keep talking.”

Anger

- If someone is visibly hostile, you can respond with, “I can see this has upset you. Why don’t you start at the beginning and tell me what has happened?”
- Allow them to identify all the factors they feel are contributing to their anger.
- You might encourage them by adding, “I understand that _____ is also a problem. What else is causing you concern?”
- Be patient and prepared to listen to them give all the details.
- Use active listening to keep the conversation on track and to reassure them you are interested in all they say.
- If they feel they have been wronged or treated unfairly, you are unlikely to persuade them otherwise in this conversation. It’s more constructive to listen to all they have to say and provide resources and formal channels for specific complaints to be heard.
- If they are clearly too angry to discuss the issue or they become angry at you, it’s OK to end the discussion by saying something like, “I see you are angry. Maybe now is not the best time. Can we come back together to discuss this later?”