



Mental Health
FIRST AID

from NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR
MENTAL WELLBEING

Active Minds: VAR Method for Compassionate Conversations



VAR stands for validate, appreciate, and refer and was developed as a conversation tool by Active Minds (www.activeminds.org). It's a guide for listening and responding in a meaningful way for people who are just having a bad day, or really struggling with their mental health. Read up and give it a try today.

active minds | V-A-R® TOOLKIT

VALIDATE their feelings.

Let them know that what they're feeling is okay and that you believe them. When someone reaches out to you, validate their feelings and acknowledge that whatever they are going through is okay. Even if you cannot relate with what they are going through, it's real to them.

VALIDATION SOUNDS LIKE...

- "That makes sense."
- "That sounds difficult."
- "You have a lot on your plate."
- "I believe you."
- "I hear you."

APPRECIATE their courage.

Speaking up can be a challenging step — let them know it's a good one. You can use this opportunity to let them know you care and they're not alone.

APPRECIATE SOUNDS LIKE...

- "Thank you for sharing."
- "Thank you for being open with me."
- "I'm here for you if you want to talk or need anything."
- "You are not alone."
- "It helps to know what you're going through."

REFER them to skills and support.

Let them know that help is available and refer them to appropriate resources. Sometimes what a person needs is a listening ear and social connection. Sometimes they will need more. You can help them to figure out what will work best for them in this moment. Notice that "Refer" is best when posed as a question.

REFER SOUNDS LIKE...

- "What makes you feel truly cared for?"
- "What's one thing that would make a big difference for you right now, in this moment?"
- "Do you think it might be helpful to talk to someone? I can go with you."
- "Do you want to make plans to go on a run together tomorrow?"

DO'S ✓

- Use caution when relating to their experience - you may not know the full context.
- Ask for what you need in a conversation.
- Seek help if you are concerned that you or someone you know is in danger of hurting themselves or others.

DON'TS ✗

- Minimize or judge what they're going through.
- Try to fix or solve their challenge.
- Try to be an expert - it's enough to be present and show you care.