

# TALKING POINTS: MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

**These four strategies can help overcome depression and anxiety.** – By Jodi Helmer

**I**t's normal to feel anxious about fitting in at school, stressed about a bad grade or worried about getting into college, but those feelings should be fleeting.

When you experience persistent sadness, excessive worry or loss of interest in your favorite activities, it might be a sign of depression, anxiety or another mental health concern, according to Meredith Draughn, school counselor at B. Everett Jordan Elementary School in Graham, N.C., and 2023 School Counselor of the Year.

"My biggest goal is always to give students hope that they are just a few steps away from better days," she adds.

These four strategies could help you (or a friend) deal with depression or anxiety.

**Know you're not alone.** Eight million teens have been diagnosed with depression and anxiety. Whether you join a support group through an organization such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) or open up to friends about your feelings, Draughn says, "Some of the most powerful words a student can hear are 'Me too!' when sharing about how they feel."

**Talk it out.** Tell a school counselor, teacher, FFA advisor or another trusted adult how you're feeling. "Starting the conversation can be hard," Draughn says. "Be brave for 90 seconds and share what is going on."

**Call for help.** Call or text 988 to reach the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. The free service connects callers experiencing a mental health crisis with someone to talk to and resources for local support. "There is something powerful about being able to share your feelings with a completely unbiased professional who can teach you new tools and strategies to deal with life's challenges," says Draughn.

**Be kind.** A friend, classmate or fellow FFA member who is suddenly sad, withdrawn, angry or defiant might be struggling with depression or anxiety. "The biggest way that youth can help their peers in the journey to positive mental health is to be a kind human, online and in person," Draughn says.

She suggests leaving encouraging notes and inviting others to sit with you at lunch or playing board games or pick-up sports, adding, "Making your peer feel loved and heard and supported is definitely the first step; hard situations are never quite as bad when you have a friend to walk alongside of you."

## Help Is Available

- **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI):** [nami.org](https://www.nami.org)
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** Dial 988
- **Discuss your feelings with a school counselor, teacher, FFA advisor or another trusted adult.**

