



YOU DON'T NEED TO BE  
AN EXPERT TO HELP.  
YOU JUST NEED TO BE THERE.

## Use V-A-R to Help a Friend

### What is V-A-R?

V-A-R is Active Minds three-step process that will improve your ability to help a friend who is struggling. V-A-R stands for Validate-Appreciate-Refer. It is a tool that you can use to help you listen and respond to your friends in a helpful way.

### When to Use V-A-R

Here are some things you might hear a friend, family member, or colleague say that suggest they may be struggling:

- “I’m just having a hard time lately.”
- “It’s hard to get going with my day sometimes.”
- “I’m really stressed out.”
- “I’ve been feeling really anxious lately.”
- “I’m so exhausted.”
- “I have too much going on.”
- “I’m feeling really overwhelmed.”
- “It’s just so hard to cope with everything.”

Consider these statements as an opening for conversation. Respond with the V-A-R steps in mind.

### Step 1 – VALIDATE Their Feelings

Let them know that what they are feeling is okay and that you believe them. It is helpful to repeat back to them their own words regarding how they are feeling or what they are going through. You can also rephrase what they are saying to check in to make sure that you are understanding. Validate sounds like:

- “That makes sense.”
- “That sounds difficult.”
- “I’m sorry you are struggling right now.”
- “It sounds like you are going through a lot right now.”

### Step 2 – APPRECIATE Their Courage

Speaking up can be a challenging step – let them know that they did the right thing by sharing and that you are here to support them. Appreciation sounds like:

- “Thank you for sharing.”
- “You are not alone.”
- “I’m here for you.”
- “I’m glad you told me what you are going through.”

### Step 3 – REFER Them to Skills and Support

Let them know help is available. Refer them to appropriate resources. Resources can include their own methods of self-care, coping strategies, social support, or Active Minds. Whenever possible, offer to stay with them. Refer sounds like:

- “Sometimes taking time for self-care and listening to a comedy podcast helps me. Can we do that together?”
- “I’ve been using this meditation app. It is really helped me slow down my thoughts”
- “I think it might be helpful to talk to someone. I can stay with you while we call/text a lifeline.”

### When Crisis Support is Needed

If you hear a friend mention the word “suicide” or suggest they are considering hurting themselves, it is crucial to help them seek professional help. Use the crisis resources below and stay with them until they are safe.

Call: **1-800-273-TALK (8255)** or Text **“Brave” to 741-741**

For more information visit: <https://www.activeminds.org/var>