

Six Tips on How to Support a Colleague: LISTEN

- L LOOK.** Does your colleague appear, sound or act differently? Physicians are used to managing their outward emotions, which can hide the impact of stress. The outward signs may be subtle, despite the degree of distress.
- I INQUIRE.** Ask your colleague how they are feeling. A simple “Are you all right?” goes a long way.
- S START** a conversation. Tell your colleague what you have noticed and express your concern.
- T TAKE the TIME.** It helps to make some time and space to listen, and to make sure you are ready. While there is never a perfect moment to start a discussion with your colleague, try to find a safe space and allow extra time for some discussion.
- E EMPATHIZE.** Empathy is different than sympathy. Consider your colleague’s experience from their perspective. Don’t be too quick to share your “I know just how you feel” stories. While you may think you are demonstrating empathy by comparing their experience to one of your own, you may in fact be drowning out your colleague’s concerns and feelings.
- N NEXT STEPS.** As a helping professional trained to diagnose and cure, you may want to jump in, identify the problem and offer a remedy. However, offering support and compassionate listening can often be more helpful than trying to solve the problem. It is an approach grounded in compassion.

One of many resources that may be of help is the OMA Physician Health Program. 1-800-851-6606 or php@oma.org.