

FARM FAMILY PEER SUPPORT

HOW TO NOTICE, ASK, & HELP



Farming runs on family, neighbors, and friends working side-by-side. When stress starts to take its toll—on the tractor seat, in the kitchen, or at the market—those same people are the first to notice and the best positioned to help.

Use this quick guide to spot early warning signs, start an honest conversation, and steer a spouse or peer toward the support that keeps both the farmer and the farm healthy.

WHY PEER SUPPORT MATTERS

- Farm life is all-in. Markets, weather, and livestock don't take days off—stress can build silently.
- Family & friends see it first. You're in the cab, at the kitchen table, or walking fence lines together.
- Early action saves health & livelihoods. A five-minute chat today can prevent accidents, illness, or crisis tomorrow.

SPOT THE STRAIN EARLY

- Pull-Away Signals: skips coffee stops, church, or group texts
- Mood Changes: short fuse, hopeless talk, no laughter
- Work Clues: livestock look rough, repairs ignored, bills unopened
- Health Habits: more alcohol/energy drinks, sleeping pills, less sleep, lingering aches

FIRST STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

- Show up. Ride along, bring a snack, tag-team chores.
- Plain talk beats fancy words. "You okay? You don't seem yourself."
- Plan one next step together. Call the lender, set a vet appointment, walk the field—small wins restore control.

CRISIS CONTACTS

- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (24/7)**
 - Call or text "988"
 - Chat online: chat.988lifeline.org
- **Farm Aid Hotline**
 - Call 1-800-327-6243
 - Mon thru Fri // 9AM to 5PM Eastern
- **Veterans Crisis Line (24/7)**
 - Dial 988, then press 1
 - Text 838255
 - Chat online: www.veteranscrisisline.net
- **GA Council on Substance Abuse**
 - Call the CARES WARM LINE by dialing 1-844-326-5400

THE 7 CONVERSATION CUES

1. **Notice** – “You don’t seem yourself lately.”
2. **Ask** – “How are you—really?”
3. **Observe** – “I’ve noticed you haven’t ... / seem ...”
4. **Check Life** – “How are things at home or with friends?”
5. **Invite** – “Let’s grab coffee and talk.”
6. **Relate (optional)** – “Something similar happened to me ...”
7. **Support / Exit** – “How can I help? I’m here if you need anything.”



CONVERSATION FLOW IN REAL LIFE

You: “Morning, Sam. You don’t seem yourself lately. Everything okay?”

Sam: “Just tired.”

You: “I’ve noticed the calves haven’t been tagged yet—seems unlike you. How are things at home?”

Sam: *opens up*

You: “Let’s walk the field together after chores and talk more. I had a slump last year—maybe something I tried could help. What would make today easier for you?”

DOs & DON'Ts

✓	⊘
Listen more than you speak	Say “Toughen up” or “Everyone’s stressed”
Keep questions open-ended	Diagnose or preach
Match their pace—silence is okay	Fill gaps with your own stories
Offer concrete help (“I’ll haul feed”)	Promise secrecy if safety is at risk



IF RISK IS HIGH

(Talking of Suicide, Guns, or “I’m done”)

Take them seriously. Stay with them. Safety first; call in another trusted person if possible.

Help them remove lethal means if you can do so safely (firearms, chemicals, keys).

Call 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline right now—let a professional guide the next steps.

Take them to mental health services or an emergency room.

KEEP IT GOING

- Check back tomorrow & next week. Consistency shows you mean it.
- Share a chore. Fence repair, feed run—time together builds trust.
- Point to pros. Extension agents, churches, counselors—backup matters.
- Mind your own stress. Peer support works best when you’re rested and connected, too.

PRACTICE SCRIPT: PEER SUPPORT

This role-play lets you safely rehearse a tough but lifesaving conversation by stepping into Alex's shoes—any peer, spouse, neighbor, or advisor who notices something is wrong—and guiding Sam, a friend or family member overwhelmed by farm stress and possible suicidal thoughts, through the seven conversation cues (Notice, Ask, Observe, CheckLife, Invite, Relate, Support/Exit) and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's questions and actions, then switching roles to experience both perspectives and build confidence to listen, ask directly about suicide, and connect loved ones to professional help in real life.

ALEX: Morning, Sam. You don't seem yourself lately.



Notice the behavior

SAM : Just tired, that's all.

ALEX: How are you—really?



Ask what's really going on

SAM : Things are rough—prices are down and the tractor's broke down again.

ALEX: I've noticed you haven't been at breakfast with the guys, and you seem worn out.



Explain Your Observations

SAM : Too much on my plate.

ALEX: How are things at home or with friends?



Check life

SAM : Katie's worried about the bills, and I've been keeping to myself.

ALEX: I'm so glad you're telling me about how much is going on and how you're feeling.



Let them know you're listening

Thank you for talking with me.

This all sounds really difficult.

Let's grab coffee and talk after we move these calves.



Invite

[They finish chores and sit with coffee in the farm office.]

ALEX: Something similar happened to me last fall when feed costs shot up...



Relate

I hear you saying the repairs and bills are stacking up and you feel alone.



Repeat back

SAM : Exactly.

ALEX: That sounds like a lot to handle. What are you doing to take care of yourself?



Check on self care

SAM : Mostly late-night fixes and beer.

ALEX: This situation sounds rough. What can I do to help?



Offer help

SAM : Not sure anyone can.

ALEX: Would it be helpful if we worked together on a plan for the tractor repair and the bills?



Build a plan

SAM : Maybe... I don't even know where to start.

ALEX: Are there other people who've helped you when things were tough before?



Check on peer support

Could any of them pitch in now?

SAM : Katie tries, but I just push her away.

ALEX: Does it ever get so tough that you think about ending your life?



Don't be afraid to ask about suicide

SAM : (quiet) Yeah... I've thought about killing myself a few times.

ALEX: I really care about you. You can talk to me—I won't judge, and I'll do everything I can to help. ←

How long have you felt this way?

When did these feelings start? ←

Show
Your
Support

Encourage them to keep talking— and really listen

SAM : A couple of months—since the storm.

ALEX: Have these thoughts changed your sleep or work?

SAM : Can't sleep; fences are falling apart.

ALEX: How often are you having these thoughts?

SAM : Most nights.

ALEX: When it gets really bad, what do you do?

SAM : Sit in the shop with the rifle and a beer.

ALEX: What scares you about these thoughts?

SAM : Leaving Katie with this mess.

ALEX: What do you need to feel safe right now?

SAM : Lock the rifle, I guess.

Ask them about changes in their life
and how they are coping. Take the time to
calmly listen to what they have to say, and ask
some follow-up questions.

[They walk to the shop. Alex locks the rifle in a safe and pockets the key to give to Katie.]

ALEX: The fact that you're having these thoughts tells me something
significant is going on for you right now, and I want to help you
get connected to resources that can help.

I can call your insurance with you or look up a counselor.

I can drive you to the appointment—then we'll grab coffee after.

SAM : Having you there would help.

ALEX: First, let's call 988 together, okay? I'm right here with you.

Reassure them that help is
available and that these feelings
are a signal that it's time to talk to
a mental health professional.

Help them connect

*[Alex dials 988 on speakerphone. Sam talks with the counselor;
an appointment is set for tomorrow morning.]*

ALEX: Tomorrow at 10 I'll swing by, we'll work on that plan,
and meet the counselor—sound good?

SAM : Yeah. Thanks, Alex.

[They exit the shop side by side.]

Remember: Don't leave your meeting with a farmer who is under lots of stress without agreeing to some kind of plan or next steps going forward. Make sure they understand that there are options available and there are people who care and can help, including counseling professionals if needed.

PRACTICE SCRIPT: FARM COUPLE SUPPORT

This role-play lets you safely rehearse a tough but lifesaving conversation by stepping into Emily's shoes—the caring spouse who notices her partner's distress—and guiding John, a farmer weighed down by stress and possible suicidal thoughts, through the seven conversation cues (Notice, Ask, Observe, CheckLife, Invite, Relate, Support/Exit) and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's recommended questions and actions, then switching roles to feel both perspectives and build the confidence to listen, ask directly about suicide, and connect loved ones to professional help when it truly matters.

EMILY: Hey, love, you've been awfully quiet all week, especially today.



Notice the behavior

JOHN: Long day, that's all.

EMILY: I know the "just-long-day" look, and this feels different. How are you—really?



Ask what's really going on

JOHN: Corn prices keep sagging, the combine's leaking oil again, and I'm chasing bills.

EMILY: I've noticed you skipped church two Sundays, didn't tease the kids at breakfast, and the shop lights stayed on past midnight three nights straight. I'm not keeping score—just worried because I see you.



Explain Your Observations

JOHN: Feels like the whole farm's on my shoulders.

EMILY: I found a couple empties in the tractor cab and your parts catalog still unopened. When's the last time you grabbed coffee with Mark and the guys?



Check life

JOHN: Can't remember—weeks, I guess.

EMILY: Thank you for trusting me with this. I hate that you're carrying it alone. Anyone would feel buried. Let's finish supper and talk while the house is finally quiet.



Let them know you're listening



Invite

[They settle in with plates and the familiar farm-house mug of coffee.]

EMILY: Remember when feed bills spiked last year and I panicked about the ledger? You talked me off the ledge. Let me return the favor. So I'm hearing repairs, bills, and lousy markets stacking up, and you feel boxed in.



Relate



Repeat back


JOHN: Pretty much.

EMILY: That's a heavy load. What small thing have you done for yourself lately—even ten minutes in the woods?




Check on self care

JOHN: Mostly fixing stuff late and cracking open beers.

EMILY: Okay. How can I help tonight? Name it—I'm on your team. 


Offer help

JOHN : Don't know if anyone can help with this mess.

EMILY: How about tomorrow morning we sketch out a plan—
one column for repairs, one for bills, and see where family can pitch in?
We'll tackle it together. 


Build a plan

JOHN : Maybe... I'm not sure where to begin.

EMILY: We don't have to begin alone. Dad will happily turn a wrench,
and Ethan loves playing banker. Think we could call them? 


Check on peer/family support

JOHN : Your brother could sort the engine, yeah.


EMILY: Honey... do things ever feel so dark you wonder if everyone
would be better off without you? 

Don't be afraid to ask about suicide

JOHN : (soft) I've thought about ending it, more than once.


EMILY: Thank you for saying that out loud. I love you more than acres and yields,
and nothing you say will scare me off. 

Show your support

How long have those thoughts been hanging around? 

Encourage them to keep talking — and really listen

JOHN : Since the drought dried up the back forty—couple months.

EMILY: Are they stealing your sleep or making chores harder? 

Ask them about changes in their life and how they are coping. Take the time to calmly listen to what they have to say, and ask some follow-up questions.

JOHN : Nights are worst; fences are slipping.

EMILY: How often do they show up?

JOHN : Most nights lately.

EMILY: When they hit hardest, what happens?

JOHN : I sit in the shop with the shotgun and a beer.

EMILY: I can see why that scares you. What would help you feel safe tonight?

JOHN : Probably locking the gun in the safe.

[They walk to the mudroom; Emily locks the shotgun and tucks the key away.]

EMILY: Thank you for letting me help with that. These thoughts are signals that we need extra backup, and I'm right beside you. Let's call someone together—speakerphone, you and me, it's ok for us to ask someone for help. Sound okay?



Reassure them that help is available and that these feelings are a signal that it's time to talk to a mental health professional.



Help them connect

JOHN : Having you next to me helps.

EMILY: After the call we'll check insurance for a counselor, and tomorrow I'll drive you to the appointment. Then we'll grab breakfast—bacon always makes plans clearer.

JOHN : Deal. Thanks, Em.

*[Emily dials 988; John talks with the counselor.
They schedule an appointment for tomorrow.]*

EMILY: I'll pick you up at ten, we'll meet with the counselor, and tackle that plan. Good?

JOHN : Good. Really good. Love you.

EMILY: Love you more. Now let's finish this pie before it cools.

Remember: Don't leave your meeting with a farmer who is under lots of stress without agreeing to some kind of plan or next steps going forward. Make sure they understand that there are options available and there are people who care and can help, including counseling professionals if needed.