

How to Listen to Someone Who Is Hurting

It is natural to feel reluctant or even afraid of facing another person's feelings. But is it important not to let this fear prevent us from doing what we can to help someone who is suffering.

Some guidelines to make the **Process Easier**

- ❖ The most important thing to do is simply be there.
- ❖ Don't interrupt. Keep comments brief and simple so that you don't get the person off track.
- ❖ Ask questions which show your interest and encourage the person to continue talking, for example...
 - "What happened next"
 - "What was that like"
- ❖ Give verbal and non verbal messages of care and support. Facial expressions and body posture go along way toward showing your interest.
- ❖ Let people know that it's OK to cry. Some people are embarrassed if they cry in front of others. Handing over a box of tissues can help are normal and appropriate. It's also OK if you get a bit teary yourself.
- ❖ Don't be distress by differences in the way people respond. One person may react calmly, while another may express strong emotions. One person may have an immediate emotional response; another may be "numb" at first and respond emotionally later. Emotions are rarely simple.
- ❖ Don't offer unsolicited advice. People usually will ask for advice later if they need it; initially it just gets in the way of talking things out.
- ❖ Don't turn the conversation into a forum for your own experience. If you have had a similar experience, you may want

- to mention it briefly when the moment is right. But do not say, “I know exactly how you feel.”
- ❖ It’s natural to worry about saying the “wrong thing”. The following is a brief but helpful list of three other things not to say to someone who is suffering.
 - Anything critical of the person
 - “You shouldn’t take it so hard”
 - “You’re overreacting”
 - Anything which tries to minimize the person’s pain.
 - “It could be a lot worse”
 - “You’ll get over it”
 - Anything which asks the person to disguise or reject his/hurt feelings.
 - “You have to pull yourself together”
 - “You need to be strong for your children’s sake”
 - ❖ People will understand if you say something awkward in a difficult situation.
 - ❖ Once you have finished talking, it may be appropriate to offer simple forms of help. This could include meals, rides, assistance with children, etc.
 - ❖ Also take care of yourself by talking to a friend, going for a walk, or whatever else may restore your spirits. Congratulate yourself on having had the courage to help someone in need when it wasn’t easy.

Information courtesy of Brian Pickering, Alberta Health Services, Grief Counselor, RockyView Hospital, May 2011.