

DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY?

That's okay! Connecting compassionately and holding space with others is a skill that can be developed.

While each situation and person is unique, there are a few guidelines that you can follow which may help you to respond more compassionately when people are struggling and seeking support.

PAUSE THE PLATITUDES

Platitudes are the common phrases that are often shared when trying to cheer someone up or show support (e.g. "they are in a better place now"). Responding with a platitude when someone shares vulnerably can come off as uncaring, dismissive, and rude.

EMPATHY OVER PITY

Pity is the feeling of sorrow over someone's misfortune, whereas empathy is the ability to take the perspective and understand the emotions of another person. Using empathy to respond compassionately allows for a range of emotions and responses and can help someone to feel seen.

HOLD BACK THE ADVICE

When supporting someone who is struggling, there can be an urge to respond with advice. Even if you believe the advice is great and helpful, providing advice without being asked to do so can come off as dismissive. It may imply that you don't want to or have time to listen, or that you think you know better than the other person.

LET SILENCE SIT

Sometimes we don't know exactly what to say. It is okay to let silence sit for a few moments, to reflect on what was shared and develop an intentional response. Sometimes, the best response is the honest one- "thank you for trusting me and sharing. I don't know exactly what to say, but I'm here for you and care about you."

ASK BEFORE ASSUMING

Assuming how someone would like to be supported isn't always helpful. It's okay to ask the person what they may need in the moment. For some people, a comforting hug might be appreciated. For others, sitting side-by-side in silence, but together, may be what they need.

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One way to help develop this skill is to complete a training. Below is a list of mental health and suicide prevention trainings that may help to increase the skills to recognize when someone is struggling, provide support, and connect to further help if needed.

BE THERE CERTIFICATE

BeThere.org is a project of Jack.Org, a Canadian non-profit which focuses on youth mental health. BeThere uses a framework of 5 Golden Rules to teach individuals how to have a caring conversation with someone who might be struggling with their mental health. The BeThere Certificate is available for free, for those 16 years of age or older.

Learn more: www.bethere.org

LIVINGWORKS TRAINING

LivingWorks has been developing suicide prevention and intervention trainings for over 40 years. They offer a continuum of training with different options depending on a person's capacity and the level of support and intervention they feel comfortable providing. Start, which is the first training in the continuum, is an online, self-paced training which gives learners the foundational skills to identify when someone is struggling, and connect them to further help.

Learn more: www.livingworks.net

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is an international program active in 20 countries. The MHFA Canada program aims to improve mental health literacy, and provide the skills and knowledge to help people better manage potential or developing mental health problems in themselves or someone else.

Learn more: www.openingminds.org