



# HOW TO LISTEN TO SOMEONE WHO IS HURTING

Whenever people face bereavement, injury or other kinds of trauma, they need to talk about it in order to heal.

To talk, they need willing listeners.

- The most important thing to do is simply to **be there and listen and show you care.**
- **Find a private setting where you won't be overheard or interrupted.** Arrange things so that there are no large objects, such as a desk, between you and the person.
- **Keep your comments brief and simple** so that you don't get the person off track.
- **Ask questions that show your interest** and encourage the person to keep talking.
- **Give verbal and non-verbal messages of caring and support.** Facial expressions and body posture go a long way toward showing your interest.
- **Let people know that it's OK to cry.**
- **Don't be distressed by differences in the way people respond.** One person may react calmly, while another expresses strong feelings. One person may have an immediate emotional response; another may be "numb" at first and respond emotionally later. Unless you see signs of actual danger, simply accept the feelings as that person's natural response at the moment. If a person usually is rational and sensible, those qualities will return once their painful feelings are expressed.
- **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 experiences.** If you have had a similar experience, you may want to mention that briefly when the moment seems right. But do not say, "I know exactly how you feel," because everybody is different.

## WHAT NOT TO SAY

- anything critical of the person
- anything that tries to minimize the person's pain
- anything that asks the person to disguise or reject his or her feelings

## OFFER SIMPLE HELP

Once you have finished talking, it may be appropriate to offer simple forms of help.

Check about basic things like eating and sleeping. Sharing a meal may help the person find an appetite. Giving a ride to someone too upset to drive may mean a lot. Ask what else you can do to help.

Source: U.S. Office of Personnel Management