

Helping a Friend

When friends come to you with a problem or with a need to express their feelings of frustration, despair, confusion, etc., you may sometimes feel helpless to respond to them. Sometimes, it is hard to know how to help a friend. Here are some suggestions about what you can do to help your friend feel less lonely or confused:

Some signs of trouble and suicidal thoughts:

- References to death or suicide in conversation, jokes, or writings
- Preoccupation with death and dying
- Withdrawal from friends and social activities
- Loss of interest in schoolwork, work, and other activities
- Abrupt changes in behavior, mood or appearance
- Pursuit of dangerous activities
- References to previous suicide attempts
- Drug or alcohol problems
- Signs of depression: crying, hopelessness, sleeping or eating problems, low energy, low self-esteem, excessive guilt

Ways to be helpful when a friend shows some of these signs:

- Take the signs seriously.
- Ask to talk to the person.
- Say you are concerned. Point out the signs you've noticed.
- Be a good listener. Your friend is helped more by what he/she says than by what you say.
- Accept your friend as a person even though you may not agree with his or her behavior.
- Avoid making judgments or reactions such as surprise, shock, or amusement unless you are genuinely sharing your friend's feelings.
- Don't make decisions for your friend. What you may do in the same situation may not be the best thing for your friend to do.
- If you feel you cannot provide the help your friend needs, encourage him or her to seek others who can, such as a trusted family member or staff member at the Counseling Services.
- Continue to be available to your friend. If you are feeling overwhelmed and your friend does not want to talk to anyone else, you may want to talk to a counselor about how you can better help your friend and take care of yourself.
- If it's unclear that the person is suicidal, ask, "Have things gotten so bad that you're actually thinking of hurting yourself?" Asking about suicide is a sign of caring.
- Don't be sworn to secrecy. Say that you need to talk with someone to make sure they are safe.
- If the person is acutely suicidal--they may do something right away--don't leave them alone. Have someone else promptly call the Health Center.
- If the situation isn't an immediate emergency, refer the person to the Counseling Service. Tell the person you will contact the Counseling Service to explain the situation.
- For after hours emergencies, call the Health Center Emergency (338 11 10).

Friends who we just can't seem to help:

You may find yourself in the helping role with a friend who cannot define specific concerns, who cannot take the initiative to carry out any defined options, who constantly comes to you to talk about the same problem, or who continues to be upset without taking steps to resolve the problem. In such cases, you may want to suggest that the person seek professional counseling. You might say something like: *"We have been talking about this same problem for weeks and nothing seems to be changing for you. I know this has been a difficult time for you but I just don't know what to do to help you and I think you need to talk with someone who is trained to help people with their problems."*

You might suggest they go to the counseling center. If your friend resists seeking help, you may want to consult with the counseling center to get assistance with your own feelings about dealing with your friend under these stressful conditions.

Referances:

Cornell University Handbook (2010). *Recognizing and Responding to Students in Distress: A Faculty Handbook*.

Need Additional Help?

For further information, please e-mail at: kures@ku.edu.tr