

When helping others, who may be in distress, consider the following guidelines. It is essential to recognize your limits. Consult with and refer to professional helpers whenever you've surpassed your comfort level or need additional information and assistance.



When approached:

1. Listen with openness.

- a. "Tell me about your concern..." and use open-ended questions (cannot be answered with one word)
- b. Use inclusive, non-judgmental language (avoid "shoulds" and "musts")
- c. As issue is presented, use your voice to minimally encourage disclosure ("I'm with you"), and ask questions for clarification
- d. Assume interested body posture (not intrusive; take cues from helpee—different degrees of personal space)

2. Suspend problem-solving.

- a. Don't rush into solutions (might not be what he/she wants)
- b. Ask, "How can I best help you?"

3. Assess urgency/emergency.

- a. Determine if safety of helpee or others is at risk now or in near future
- b. Determine who else has been told and involved, so you don't duplicate efforts
- c. If concerned about safety of helpee, say so; and question helpee about any concerns he/she has about own safety

4. Determine your role(s).

- a. *Counselor*: helping to clarify goals and identify steps to take
- b. *Mentor*: serving as a sponsor to facilitate the person's growth
- c. *Advisor*: giving information about opportunities and resources
- d. *Broker*: serving as go-between for the person and the resources for information/assistance
- e. *Referral Agent*: identifying resources to help with specific problems
- f. *Advocate*: intervening on behalf of the person for benefits and elimination of obstacles
- g. *Consultant*: helping to diagnose a problem and develop alternative solutions; assisting or advising in implementing solutions and evaluating success
- h. *Mediator*: engaging two or more persons in constructive dialogue and negotiation regarding a dispute

5. Don't promise confidentiality, but offer privacy.

- a. Help individual understand that you will honor request for privacy but that you need to be able to consult with appropriate individuals about complex or safety issues
- b. Avoid the "drama triangle"—encourage direct communication, when safety is not a concern
- c. Talk with the helpee about the potential value of consulting with outside person

When a need seems apparent:

1. Approach the person privately.

- a. Talk person-to-person, preferably in person or on the phone
- b. Don't assume e-mail messages or letters to a person are private

2. Don't mix agendas.

- a. Focus on your concerns, rather than on a business item and your concerns; this will dilute or even sabotage your mission of helping
- b. At the same time, allow for rapport-building conversation

3. Talk about what you have observed.

- a. Speak in concrete, behavioral terms: "I've noticed that you have looked tired lately," "I've noticed that you haven't been at our meetings for the past month"
- b. If observations are second-hand, get permission from the direct observer before talking with the helpee

4. Offer your assistance.

- a. Let the person know you're available without forcing the help upon him/her: "Can I help with anything?" "If you want to talk, I'll be glad to listen."
- b. Respect the individual's refusal for help, unless you're concerned about imminent danger. You may respond with something like, "I don't want to pry, but I am concerned. Perhaps you're already talking with someone else about this. If so, just know that I'll be glad to be another resource or simply a listening ear."

5. Trust your instincts.

- a. If situation feels dangerous to you in any way (physical safety, emotional safety), don't approach the person alone
- b. Listen to yourself—your own emotions and physical reactions may be good indicators about what is really going on

6. If you witness bizarre or dangerous behavior, take immediate action.

- a. Get appropriate support (not alone); consult with a staff person, call a mental health service, or call 911
- b. Ask direct questions

7. Remember: Asking questions can provide the person relief.

- a. There are very few instances in which stating observations and asking questions in a non-judgmental, gentle way aggravates problems
- b. Keep in mind that you may be the only one who has cared enough to notice

IN ALL CASES: Recognize and Respect Your Own Limits

Knowledge/skills * Time * Emotional resources/triggers