

# HOW TO BE A GOOD FRIEND TO SOMEONE WHO IS HURTING

Mental, behavioral, and emotional health challenges affect 1 in 4 people in the United States. This means that if you're not personally struggling with something, you definitely know someone who is. This person may be a family member, a best friend, someone in your class, or just an acquaintance. Obviously the closer you are to the hurting person, the more of an impact you can make. However, here are some quick things you can do to help a friend who is hurting.

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## BE OPEN, HONEST, AND VULNERABLE

Most hurting people are afraid to reach out for help to begin a conversation. They are afraid of being a burden, ruining the mood, being a party pooper, or being perceived as needy or attention-seeking. Because of this, we as friends have to show that we are open to honest and vulnerable conversations by being honest and vulnerable ourselves. When you allow yourself to be hurt, sad, angry, uncomfortable, etc. in front of your friends, you are giving them permission to be real with you as well.

## ASK DIRECT QUESTIONS

Similar to above, people who are hurting often want to talk but they don't want to bring anyone else down. Be genuinely interested in what is happening with your friend. Ask questions, and don't be afraid to be direct (especially if you are concerned that someone is in danger). Encourage them to keep opening up. Some great questions include, "What happened after that?" "How did they respond?" "What was going through your mind when that happened?"

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## ENCOURAGE PROFESSIONAL HELP

If you think your friend may be struggling with an illness like depression or anxiety, it is important they see a doctor sooner rather than later. Bring up the possibility of a doctor and see their response; many people are fearful of seeking treatment or express disbelief that it will help. Offer to go with them if they are fearful or help them research their struggles to learn about treatments to take away the fear of the unknown.

## CHECK IN - TREATMENT OR NOT

Regardless of whether or not your friend is receiving treatment, check in on them on a regular basis. This could be making a point that once a week you really ask them how they're doing, in a safe place that allows them to answer (not in the middle of a busy hallway!) Treatment can take a while to work, and just because someone is seeing a doctor or taking medicine doesn't mean they suddenly don't need the support of their friends. In fact, the encouragement of friends could be the make-or-break that allows the other treatment to work!

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## HAVE REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Imagine your friend walking around in a hospital gown. We know people who are sick need some extra patience, extra space, more recovery time, more sleep, etc. – but we also know that people who are sick don't want to be isolated either. Continue to treat your friend as usual: invite them places, tell jokes, copy their homework, whatever, but also be prepared that they may not have the energy to hang out like they used to. Make sure they know that you love them anyway.

## DO NOT KEEP DANGEROUS SECRETS

Good friends are confidants, people we can trust in that won't spread rumors or talk behind our backs, because they care for us. A great friend cares enough that if someone is in danger – whether from abuse, violence, self-injury, suicidal or homicidal thoughts – they will do everything in their power to make sure that person is safe. Great friends recognize that sometimes people get trapped in bad situations and are unable or unwilling to see a safe way out. In those times, it takes courageous friends to step into that darkness and to do what it takes to keep them safe, and this could mean going to an adult, parent, or teacher with your concerns. Yes, your friend may be upset with you for “betraying their confidence”, but our experience has shown that after an initial flare of emotions and anger, the friend usually calms down and sees that “wow, my friend really does care about me.”

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## LEARN ABOUT THEIR STRUGGLES

Kevin Hines, one of only 26 people who have survived jumping off the golden gate bridge, recalls how when he was hospitalized for bipolar disorder, his uncle came to visit him every day in the hospital with a cup of soup, a comic book, and a new book about bipolar disorder. Learning about a struggle or illness can help separate the person from the situation. The more you learn about your friend's struggles, the more empathetic you can be to their situation and the more support you can give.

## ASK

The simple and sincere gesture of just asking what you can do to help means a lot. Your friend may have an idea like helping with homework, cleaning their room, going out for ice-cream, or they may have no clue what will be helpful. The fact that you asked shows that you care, and they will be grateful for that reminder.

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## TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

When a loved one is struggling it can have a profound effect on you. When you're focused on giving to someone else, it can be easy to neglect your own needs. Remember that the help we offer others will be sub-par if we are not in a healthy and stable place ourselves. In the midst of being a good friend, reach out to other good friends whom you feel you can confide in. Take a break. As much as you want to help others, you must also realize that you have your own life to lead and prioritizing yourself does not make you selfish.



WWW.PLEASELIVE.ORG

### Hurting? Help is available:

Call 1-800-273-8255

Text 741-741

Chat [ImAlive.org](http://ImAlive.org), [CrisisChat.org](http://CrisisChat.org)