

SUPPORTING PEERS IN SENSITIVE SITUATIONS

Sometimes friends and peers are the first place we turn in difficult times. If a peer comes to you about a difficult or sensitive situation, it is not your responsibility to be able to fix it, but knowing how to respond in the moment can have a big impact on the other person. Keep these guidelines in mind.

Verbal Language Do's:

Supportive response guidelines and examples:

- Focus on their experience, not your own.
- Thank them for deciding to reach out and trust you.
- Offer affirmative responses to convey ongoing attention, like "uh-huh," "wow."
- Name or reflect back emotions, gently. "That sounds like it would be scary."
- Ask open questions, but not about uncomfortable details. Ask "is there more you want to share?" "Do you have ideas how you'd like to be supported?"
- Validate their emotions: "It makes total sense you'd feel that way," "I think anyone would feel the same in this situation."
- Point out strengths. "You've been managing so much at the same time."

Verbal Language Don'ts:

- Don't change the subject or ask off-topic questions.
- Don't immediately speak about your own experience.
- Don't minimize in an attempt to comfort. Avoid things like: "It happened a long time ago; maybe you should move on," "Everyone has trouble at home."
- Avoid judgments about their decisions. Don't say, "Why did you decide to ____?" "Why don't you ____?"

Body Language Do's:

Signal interest and attention by:

- Sit upright, maybe lean forward.
- Use affirming gestures like nodding.
- Make appropriate facial expressions to show sympathy, care.
- Make periods of eye contact if comfortable.

Body Language Don'ts:

Avoid discouraging body language:

- Avoid judgmental expressions when possible, such as shock or skepticism.
- Don't fidget, check the time, check your phone, etc.