

Don't say this to someone who is hurting



Where have you been? the mother demanded. The little girl replied, "On my way home, I met a friend who was crying because she had broken her doll." "Oh," said her mother, "then you stopped to help her fix the doll?" "Oh, no," replied the little girl, "I stopped to help her cry."

When someone is hurting, do *not* respond with:

- **Advice/instruction** - "Let me tell you how to solve the problem." Or, "The next time that happens you should..."
- **Logic/reasoning** - "Let me analyze the situation and tell you why it happened." Or, "I think the reason that happened was because..."
- **Pep talk** - "You're a winner! You'll make it through these tough times!" Or, "I'm sure tomorrow will be a better day."
- **Minimize the incident** - "Sure it hurt, but get things into perspective; there's a lot going on that's good." Or, "Aren't you being overly sensitive?"
- **Anger** - "That makes me so mad! They shouldn't get away with that!" (Angry at who caused the hurt.) Or, "I'm so upset that you keep getting yourself hurt." (Angry at the one who is hurting.)

- **Martyr's complex** - "I had something similar happen to me." Or, "After the kind of day I had, let me tell you what hurt really feels like."
- **Personal fear/anxiety** - "I'm afraid that's going to affect my life too."
- **Mr. "Fix it"** - "I can't believe that salesman talked to you like that. I'm calling the store right now and talking to his boss." Or, "I know you must have been scared when you had a flat tire on that lonely road. Tomorrow I'll take the car in and get a whole new set of tires."
- **Spiritualizing** - "Well, you know that God will work all this out for your good." Or, "Remember what Joseph said when his brothers mistreated him: 'They meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.'"

The best antidote for hurt is comfort. Comfort is an emotion, not a cerebral commodity. It is also very simple; if we make it complicated, we'll miss the mark.

We can comfort others through gentle words, appropriate touch, and our quiet presence.

Gentle words

While there are many words in the Oxford Dictionary, only about 40-50 words qualify as comforting words. The "vocabulary of comfort" includes phrases like these:

- "I'm really sorry that you're hurting."
- "It hurts me that you're hurting because I love you and care for you."
- "It saddens me that you felt _____ (embarrassed, rejected, belittled). I know that must have hurt you."

When comforting someone, the fewer words spoken, the better. If we say too much, we will inevitably move into the cognitive, rational realm, which will be counterproductive.

When speaking words of comfort, it's also important that our tone of voice be complementary to what is being said. Words of comfort should be spoken gently and with compassion.

Appropriate touch

Proper and tender acts of physical affection can also minister comfort. Depending on the relationship, a warm embrace, a hug, holding hands, or a kiss can help communicate care and concern.

Quiet presence

Sometimes, just being *with* a person who is hurting is helpful. When I was a young minister, I wasn't sure what to say to someone who had just lost a loved one. A wise mentor taught me that the "ministry of your presence" is powerful and effective. Just being physically present communicates care and concern.

So when you encounter someone who is hurting, do not do the nine items listed at the beginning of this essay. Do extend comfort. You'll be amazed at the outcome.