

The American Counseling Association's "*Counseling Corner*" Weekly Columns

How To Help A Friend In Need

from the American Counseling Association

It usually isn't difficult to offer help to a friend or relative. Maybe he or she needs short-term financial assistance, advice about an upcoming vacation, or maybe just a ride to a doctor's appointment. Most of us are ready to step up and help when it's small things like that.

But in some cases, offering help can be much more complicated. This occurs when someone close to us appears to be doing or saying things that we find troubling or disturbing. Offering help in such situations is more difficult because the person hasn't requested our assistance, and, in some cases, may resent our stepping in.

You might struggle over whether you should share your opinions with this friend, worrying that it might jeopardize the relationship. This feeling can hold true whether it's a friend, or someone even closer such as a spouse or another close relative.

The trick is to approach the person with your concerns in a manner that will minimize the risk of insulting or alienating the person. One way to do this is what is sometimes called a "caring confrontation."

It begins by ensuring that you are in a private place and that the conversation is only between the two of you. The initial part of this type of confrontation is simply to describe the behavior that concerns you. You don't want to criticize, interpret or offer personal opinions, but simply to objectively describe the facts as you see them.

It helps to make your description positive, rather than negative and accusatory. Instead of saying "You sure are depressed these days," a more positive spin would simply be, "You don't seem to be quite as happy lately."

The second part of this approach is to ask whether your friend agrees with your observation and to offer an invitation to discuss it.

This "one - two" approach provides an opportunity for your friend to talk about possible issues without positioning you as too nosy or offering to "fix" the problem. Sometimes simply talking about a problem is a major step in helping to work it out.

There may also be more serious issues going on that would benefit from professional help, such as meeting with a professional counselor. In such cases, your job is simply to be supportive and helpful. Doing this can assist someone address what's bothering him or her, and ensure that your relationship is maintained.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

###

words: 400