

HOW TO LISTEN TO A FRIEND



THE BEST WAY TO FIND OUT WHAT'S GOING ON WITH YOUR FRIEND IS TO WELL, LISTEN.

Knowing how to listen well can be tricky sometimes – you might want to immediately give advice if a friend is coming to you with a problem, or, you might have your own strong opinions because you've been through the same thing, and maybe that's why they're turning to you for support. It's also okay to not have the answers, because your friend might just need to vent and feel understood.



HERE ARE A FEW TIPS THAT CAN HELP YOU BE A BETTER LISTENER

EMPATHIZE. It's natural to want to comment or respond right away; especially if you disagree with what your friend is saying, or think you have information that might be helpful. Your opinion matters and is genuine because you care about your friend. Sometimes it's helpful to know though, if your friend actually wants an answer or an opinion from you. They may just appreciate your nodding, suggesting you understand their feelings. What's most important for them to know is that they can talk to you, because they trust that you won't judge them.

LISTENING TIP:

FIRST, ALWAYS TRY TO UNDERSTAND WHERE THE OTHER PERSON IS COMING FROM – WHAT'S THEIR POINT OF VIEW? HEAR THEM OUT AND ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR FEELINGS. THEN, OFFER THEM YOUR OWN POINT OF VIEW ABOUT THE SITUATION.

If you do have an opinion and think it might be helpful to your friend, after you've empathized and acknowledged your friend's experience, you could try saying, "I have an idea.. ." or "You know what I think?" Then pause to see if the friend truly wants to hear it.

1. PUT THE PHONE AWAY. Don't answer your phone, look at incoming texts or allow for other interruptions while you and your friend are talking. It's important for your friend to know you're paying attention to what they're sharing with you.

2. BE AWARE OF YOUR BODY LANGUAGE. Non-verbal support is just as important as your words. A nod here and there, leaning in, or any sign that you understand and acknowledge what your friend is sharing, will help them feel more comfortable with you.



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Depending on the situation and your relationship with the friend, you might tell him/her that you want to go to someone else about the problem they have shared with you.

Trust your instincts. Part of being a good friend is knowing when the support your friend needs is more than you can give.



TALK TO A TRUSTED TEACHER, COUNSELOR, MENTOR OR ANOTHER PERSON IN YOUR SCHOOL OR COMMUNITY THAT CAN UNDERSTAND AND HELP DETERMINE APPROPRIATE NEXT STEPS . . .



DO YOU HAVE A FRIEND THAT MIGHT NEED HELP?

Some changes to look for that might concern you:

- Are they shutting people out?
- Have you heard them say they don't care and would rather sleep or numb their feelings?
- Are they not enjoying things they used to enjoy?

These can be signs of depression. Talk to your friend, but talk to a guidance counselor at school or in your community group, too, to share your perceptions. Or, if you feel you need to remain anonymous, you can make a report to Safe2TellCO.org to have a professional follow-up with your concerns.

WHAT MAKES FOR A GOOD FRIEND?



Someone that...motivates me, wants the best for me, is supportive.

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HOW TO HAVE A CONVO WITH A FRIEND



Whether it's in person or on social media you're having conversations with your friends at any given moment throughout the day. Sometimes, the conversation might not be an easy one, and an important issue can come up – anxiety and stress about school or relationship, trouble at home, or the pressure to do things they're not sure of. Your friend is turning to you because they value your time and thoughts this responsibility could even stress you out!

HERE ARE A FEW TIPS THAT CAN HELP YOU FIND YOUR WORDS

- 1. SHOW YOUR LOVE!** Let your friend know that you're there for them and that you're glad they feel like they can not only talk to you, but turn to you when they need someone. This doesn't mean that you don't have boundaries – make sure you're comfortable with what's going on in your relationship and that you know what to do if you're not.
- 2. BE DIRECT.** If you're concerned about your friend or worried that they might get into trouble – tell them. It's okay to let them know how you feel, as long as you're respectful, and have listened to their side of the story.

3. TRY NOT TO BE DEFENSIVE.

A conversation takes at least two people – and just as you have your own view on things, your friend will also have their own opinions. Your similar and different interests are what make your relationship exciting, even though it can be hard to always remember that when you're talking to each other.

LISTEN AND VALIDATE A FRIEND'S OPINION AND TRY TO SEE THE SITUATION FROM THEIR SIDE AND THEN RESPECTFULLY OFFER YOUR OWN.

IF YOU DON'T AGREE, MAYBE START WITH "I HEAR WHAT YOU'RE SAYING BUT I THINK I SEE IT A LITTLE DIFFERENTLY. . ." THEN ASK, IF THEY MIGHT LIKE TO HEAR AN ALTERNATIVE OPINION. DEPENDING ON THE SITUATION, THEY MAY BE OPEN TO YOUR OPINION, OR THEY MAY NOT BE.

4. RELATE WHAT YOU HEAR TO YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES.

Sometimes you'll have no experience with something a friend brings up. But if you do, use the listening skills you already have and try to give specific examples about things that you might be worried about because of the conversation or things your friend may have brought up before. This will help your friend know that you're paying attention to what's going on, "you've been there," and perhaps you have a helpful tip.

DO YOU FEEL SUPPORTED, TOO? IF YOUR FRIENDSHIP FEELS ONE-SIDED, AND LIKE YOU'RE ALWAYS GIVING AND NOT GETTING MUCH IN RETURN FROM YOUR FRIEND (LIKE YOU'RE ALWAYS LISTENING BUT NEVER GETTING TO VENT, TOO), IT MIGHT BE TIME TO HAVE A DIRECT AND REAL CONVERSATION WITH THEM. IT SOUNDS CHEESY, BUT THE BEST FRIENDSHIPS GO BOTH WAYS.

