



How to Respond When Someone Reveals Something Hard

We all encounter hard things in our days (and some people experience major challenges or trauma). When we have close relationships, we sometimes tell each other about hard things that have happened to us. How we respond when someone opens up to us can deepen our relationship and help them work through the challenge. But our response—if not thoughtful—can make it harder for the other person to open up to us (or others) in the future. Try to follow these guidelines:

	What to Do	What Not to Do
Body Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Show you're really paying attention.• Maintain consistent eye contact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use inappropriate facial expressions.• Move too much or fidget.
Encourage Continuing to Open Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allow silence and show you're listening.• Name and reflect back feelings.• Ask clarifying questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Change the subject.• Ask off-topic questions.
Show Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stay focused on their experience.• Genuinely validate their emotions.• Point out their strengths.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reassure in dismissive ways.• Judge their decisions.• Give advice (unless requested).

Adapted from: Foyne, M. M., & Freyd, J. J. (2011). The impact of skills training on responses to the disclosure of mistreatment. *Psychology of Violence*, 1(1), 66-77. See: <http://dynamic.uoregon.edu/jjf/disclosure/goodlistener.html>

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