



How to comfort/help a friend who is being abused - Empathetic responses

If you are tending to someone who is being abused, you must keep in mind that they do not need sympathy, instead they need empathy.

What is the difference between sympathy and empathy?

Sympathy is feeling sorrow and pity for someone else's suffering, which creates a disconnection. You may be using sympathetic statements but they rarely help the other person feel better. In fact, it is counter-effective as it minimizes the other person's pain and does little to connect with how he or she is feeling.

For example, if you say: "I understand how you feel."

It is not genuine, the reality is, you can't understand what they are going through, unless you have experienced the same thing.

Instead, try the empathetic approach by saying: **"I can't fully understand how you feel but I know it must be hard. I am here for you."** It is true and genuine, you don't have to be an expert, just be there and listen.

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another person. It is more about connecting with the person and how they are feeling rather than responding to make them feel better. Keep in mind, when a friend or loved one shares something difficult with you, she is mostly looking for someone to listen.

How can I be more empathetic in my approach?

Acknowledge and validate their pain

- "I'm sorry you are going through this."
- "I hate that this happened."
- "That must be hard."
- "That sounds really challenging."
- "I can see how that would be difficult."

Share how you feel

- "Wow. I don't know what to say."
- "I wish I could make it better."
- "My heart hurts for you."
- "It makes me really sad to hear this happened."

Show gratitude

- "Thank you for sharing with me."
- "I'm glad you told me."
- "Thank you for trusting me with this. That really means a lot."
- "This must be hard to talk about. Thanks for opening up to me."

Be supportive

- "I'm here for you."
- "How can I help you?"
- "What do you need right now?"
- "I'm happy to listen any time."
- "You are brave / strong."
- "You matter."
- "I'm in on your side"
- "I'm proud of you."

There is no perfect victim/survivor. Depending on where they are in their journey, they may feel comfortable to tell you more information, but wait for them to tell you. More importantly, **DO NOT ask:**

- ~~What were you wearing?~~
- ~~How did it happen?~~
- ~~Were you drunk?~~
- ~~Are you over it now?~~
- ~~Why didn't you stop?~~

Reassure:

- I believe you
- It wasn't your fault
- You are safe
- I am here for you
- Talk to me when you are ready