

What NOT to say or do:

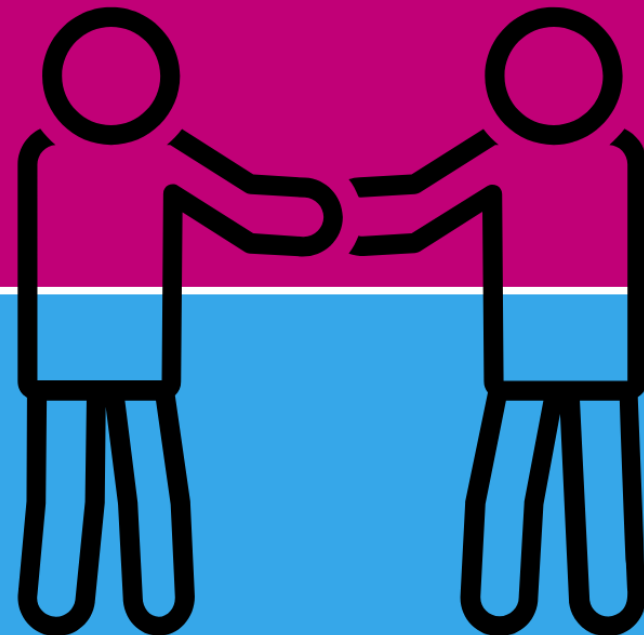


1. Do not force the person to talk.
2. Do not interrupt the person while they are talking, do not hurry them, for example by looking at your watch or talking too fast.
3. Do not touch the person if you are not sure if it is appropriate. Announce beforehand that you are going to touch them, e.g. on the arm; do not make any hasty movements.
4. Do not judge or assess what the person has or has not done or how they feel (e.g. don't say "You shouldn't feel that way" or "You should be glad you survived").
5. Do not make up things you don't know. (Neither for good nor for bad: e.g. do NOT say "I'm sure he's still alive." or "I'm sure he's not alive.").
6. Do not use technical terms that the person cannot understand.
7. Do not tell the person stories about other people.
8. Do not talk about your own difficulties or problems.
9. Do not give false promises and assurances.
10. Do not exploit your relationship as a helper. E.g. do not ask the person for money or favours for your help.
11. Do not think and act as if you had to solve the problems for the other person, do not take away the person's strength and ability to take care of themselves.
12. Speak respectfully to the person, e.g. do not call them crazy.



These recommendations are intended to help you communicate with someone who has experienced a crisis or a difficult life event. Accidents, experiences of violence, war or flight are situations that can create fear and confusion, uncertainty and shock. The way you communicate with someone who is under great stress is very important. Below we give you recommendations on how to behave when you are in a situation where you want to and can help.

Recommendations for dealing with people in crisis situations and following difficult life events



What to say and what to do:



Establish contact

1. Introduce yourself by name and offer to help. (For example: *"My name is Anna, I work here as a volunteer. I can help you."*)
2. Try to find a quiet place to sit and talk. If possible, avoid places with many distractions.
3. Make sure the person is well looked after physically, e.g. offer them a blanket if they are cold or a glass of water; hand them tissues, if they are crying.
4. Always address the person by name and use your body language to convey safety, e.g. through eye contact.
5. Respect the person's privacy and treat what is said to you as confidential.
6. Stay close to the person, but keep an appropriate distance according to their age, gender and culture.
7. Show that you are listening, for example by nodding, making eye contact or simply responding in an affirmative way (*"I am listening to you,"* *"I understand you."*). It is important that you turn your body towards the person.
8. Be patient and calm. Staying calm, signalling understanding and just being there can help a person feel safe, understood, respected, valued and well cared for. It signals that they are not alone.
9. If necessary, shield victims from journalists, the media or onlookers to protect their privacy and dignity.



Give orientation

1. Bring the person into the here and now by telling them where they are, what day, date and time it is (e.g. *"You are here in ...,"* *"Today is the ..."* and *"It is now ... o'clock"*).
2. Ask the person simple questions, e.g. simple choice questions (*"Do you want to do this or that?,"* *"Do you want to go there?"*). Let the person regain control of their choices.

3. Ask the person to do simple and achievable tasks that help them regain control and belief in their abilities.
4. Share facts if you have them. Be honest about what you don't know (*"I don't know, but I will try to find it out for you"*). If you can, give information about things that concern the person or relative, including planned actions. Speak calmly, clearly and concisely.
5. Give information which the person can understand. Express yourself simply and clearly. If necessary and if you can, give clear instructions on what to do, e.g. where to go.
6. It is possible that people do not remember past events. If possible, and if the person wants to, help them to fill in the gaps.
7. Respect the feelings of the person, e.g. about the loss of home, relatives or other stressful events (*"I'm sorry about what happened to you, I can imagine that this must be very painful for you"*).



Offer help

1. Acknowledge the person's strengths and what they have done to help themselves or others in the crisis situation.
2. Clarify what the person needs. What should happen next? What will the person do afterwards?
3. Offer practical help, e.g.:
 - Bringing together family members, friends or colleagues, if this is possible and not too dangerous. It is a good idea to bring people together who can help each other (e.g. you can ask the person to help the older ones or the children).
 - Organising childcare.
 - Gathering information (e.g. about injured relatives).
 - If the person you are helping is a parent, give them advice on how to help their children.
 - If possible, make contact with other psychosocial support services, e.g. a social worker. Emphasise that you will continue helping the person and that you will be there for them, if you can and want to.

