



KID IN CRISIS

CONVERSATION GUIDE

DURING A CRISIS YOU'LL PROBABLY STRUGGLE WITH KNOWING WHAT TO SAY, HOW MUCH TO SAY AND WHEN TO SAY IT. YOU MIGHT SAY A LOT LESS THAN YOU THOUGHT YOU WOULD WHEN NAVIGATING CRISIS WITH A KID OR TEENAGER, BUT SAYING LESS COMMUNICATES THAT YOU'RE THERE TO LISTEN. BE OKAY WITH THE PHRASE "I DON'T KNOW" BECAUSE YOU'LL NEVER KNOW EVERYTHING. YOU'LL KNOW MORE ABOUT THE KID AND WHAT MIGHT BE BEST FOR THEM AS YOU LISTEN CLOSELY AND OFFER A SAFE PLACE OF SUPPORT.

WHAT **TO** SAY

WORDS THAT HELP THEM:

1. Feel safe
2. Feel heard
3. Feel supported

HELP THEM FEEL SAFE IN CRISIS

- If the kid or teenager is comfortable, give them quick hugs or a hand on their shoulder—sometimes you don't need words.
- Keep track of them. It might mean finding them every 15 minutes or so. It might mean not letting long hours go by without checking in (or making sure someone else is). They might need some space, or they might need you right there.
- Get rid of the timelines that they feel they have to meet in order to recover.
- Be genuine and honest. Don't deny pain.

HELP THEM FEEL HEARD IN CRISIS

- Speak gently and listen longer.
- "Tell me about it . . ." is a great way to let them lead the conversation.
- "Tell me a story about that person." Or, "Tell me how you feel when . . ."
- Use very few words.

HELP THEM FEEL SUPPORTED IN CRISIS

- Cue next steps like, "You may need to . . . eat/go to school/go to church."
- Offer help with basics.
- Give them permission to take things one day and one task at a time.
- Say: "I'm here for you" often.
- Tell them to ask for help when they get upset. Let them know that you won't be upset if they're upset.
- Pray together.

WHAT **NOT** TO SAY

WORDS THAT MAKE THEM:

1. Feel unsafe
2. Feel unheard
3. Feel alone

HELP NOT TO SAY TO HELP THEM FEEL SAFE

- "If you would have done _____, then this wouldn't have happened." Shame only reinforces feelings of loss and pain. Wait to work things out. Be present and listen.
- "You're angry. You'll feel better when you calm down." Instead of prescribing a feeling, acknowledge their emotions and help them name their feelings on their own. Validating and describing emotions can provide a lot of relief.

WHAT NOT TO SAY TO HELP THEM FEEL HEARD

- Silence. Saying nothing is saying something. Some kids/teens have the bottom fall out of their lives and later say things like, "So much was happening but nobody asked."
- Don't say, "This happens a lot." If it's a crisis, it doesn't happen a lot for this kid.
- Don't say, "I understand" unless you've been working together on an issue or walking through crisis for a long period. Stick to phrases like, "Help me understand" instead.
- Don't say "You're young and resilient." Or, "There's a purpose in everything." Stay away from phrases that minimize their pain or grief. Even spiritual phrases like, "God has a plan" or "God must have needed them in heaven" can be very painful to hear at the beginning stages of grief.

WHAT NOT TO SAY TO HELP THEM FEEL SUPPORTED

- "I'm freaking out!" Stay calm so they can feel your support while you begin to understand what's going on in their world.
- "We lost Uncle Joey." Kids may understand phrases about death literally, which may cause them to be afraid. They may reason that if you could "lose" Uncle Joey, you might lose them too. Explain death more honestly. "Uncle Joey died and that means . . . we won't be able to do this anymore or see him at his house anymore."
- "I'll help you fix this." Eventually, this phrase is a good one, but initially you want to offer your presence without trying to fix things.