



Meeting People Where They Are At

When a friend, peer or loved one is feeling down or upset, it's natural to want to try and make them feel better. But sometimes acknowledging how they are feeling and sitting with them through the discomfort can be more powerful and helpful than trying to offer immediate advice or fix their pain. Meeting people where they are at means that you're not trying to drag them into a better state of mind right away when they aren't ready. It's about getting on their level, and really trying to understand what is going on in their world.

Do any of these sentences sound familiar?

"Oh it's not that bad. Things good be worse"

"But you have so much to be grateful for!"

"Don't be sad."

"Cheer up."

And many more. When someone is really upset, it can make us feel uncomfortable, nervous, or awkward, but telling someone they should feel different from how they are feeling can make them feel invalidated and alone.

The Value of Meeting People Where They Are At

Allowing people to be exactly how they are in the moment can give them a chance to express difficult emotions that may not feel safe to share with others. This approach also shows that you aren't there to judge them or tell them what's best. There is a time for offering advice, but simply letting people have a chance to share their burden with another person can be incredibly helpful.



Meeting People Where They Are At

Tips for Meeting People Where They Are At

- 1. Acknowledge Their Pain:** Rather than trying to make someone feel better right away, try acknowledging their suffering and needs. Perhaps say something like, "That sounds so hard." Or, "I don't know what that would feel like but I'm here to listen."
- 2. Don't Rush Them:** Sometimes it takes time for people to express what is going on for them. Make sure you give yourself enough time to really sit down and talk, rather than giving support in a rushed manner.
- 3. Listen:** Try listening with the intention to understand, rather than coming up with solutions right away. While advice can be helpful when requested, it's hard to deeply listen when you're already trying to come up with advice in your mind.
- 4. Be Aware of Your Own Discomfort:** Watching someone struggle can be difficult and uncomfortable. Wanting them to feel better might be about our own needs rather than what they need at the moment. Try noticing your own discomfort, acknowledge it, and breathe through it.
- 5. Trust Your Judgment:** Of course, there is a time for welcome feedback, distractions, advice or reassurances. Trust your judgment and the relationship you have with the person you are supporting. Try this step after listening to the person and allowing them to express what they are feeling and going through and encourage whoever you are supporting to seek additional support if needed. When someone you know is really struggling, it's natural to want to cheer them up and tell them it will all be okay. But sometimes people need their struggles to be acknowledged and be listened to. Rather than trying to "fix" someone and stop them from feeling the way they are feeling, try acknowledging what they are going through, be aware of your own discomfort, and deeply listen to what they are trying to express. Trust your own judgment and seek additional support if needed. Your care, compassion and concerns are valuable, and as a friend, you may just be an integral part of your friend's healing.