

Here are some tips for *relating compassionately to those who are suffering*—important to remember on a visit!

1. Pray, pray, pray. (before you go, with the person if he or she agrees, and after your visit)
2. Listen more than you speak. Make some eye contact. Let them talk.
3. Use open-ended questions, i.e., how can I help? Don't rush the person. Let them talk about feelings and thoughts.
4. Validate feelings, i.e., I think I'd feel sad/afraid/angry too if this were happening to me.
5. Keep silent, especially when you don't know what to say. Being there for the person suffering shows support and caring. You don't always have to talk.
6. A hug or touch or holding hands may be comforting to one receiver of care but not to everyone.
7. Shedding some tears together may be supportive. It releases tension and brings the suffering into the open.
8. Keep in touch with a personal card or note. Call, but ask, "Is this a good time?" Brief calls may be better than very long ones.
9. Offer to give reading material (not lend yours) after the initial crisis has passed. Lending obligates the recipient to remember who loaned the book or article and to make arrangements to return the item.
10. Keep the focus on the other person and their pain and suffering.
11. Express your sorrow that the other person is going through this suffering.
12. Know that suffering and healing take time. Don't deny a painful situation.

Tips, continued

13. Humour may be helpful after a while, but be careful. You are not there to be funny. What one person finds humorous, another person may not.
14. Avoid describing your experience with suffering unless specifically asked. Then be brief.
15. Avoid sharing details of other people's sufferings (this does not show respect for keeping the confidentiality of others).
16. Avoid phrases like "I know exactly what you are going through" because you don't. No two people experience the same suffering the same way.
17. Avoid trying to "fix" things or solve the problem.
18. Avoid pious platitudes, e.g., "It's God's will" or "God knows best" or "It's a blessing."
19. Avoid trying to cheer the person up in an attempt to make you or him/her feel better.
20. Keep your visits or calls short.
21. Visit only if you are healthy.
22. Maintain confidentiality.

These points are taken from a book by Kenneth C. Haugk called *Don't Sing Songs to a Heavy Heart. How to Relate to those who are Suffering*. It was published in 2004 by Stephen Ministries, Saint Louis, Missouri. See www.stephenministries.org for ordering information. They were published in the seminar – *I can't, but with God I can* © 2008 Lutheran Women's Missionary League–Canada.

