

# HELPING A HURTING BROTHER



College is a time of exploration, development, and growth. Students are trying to discover who they are and seek to solidify their values by developing their own beliefs and views. It is also a time of newfound independence, which may be better described as self-dependence. This time of self-discovery can be overwhelming. Research has shown an increase in depression, anxiety, and loneliness among college students. These emotional states have a strong correlation with substance abuse, physical stress, lack of motivation, panic attacks, and suicidality. As a facilitator and brother, you will be a role model whom our students can come to for help. This resource is a brief tool that offers step-by-step directions and language to practice in order to best aid our students in navigating their college years and help set a healthy foundation for their futures.

## **Facilitator Boundaries: Protect Yourself, Too**

Remember, no matter how much you may want to help the student recover and heal, their problems are theirs to own. In the end, only they can choose the direction they will take or the decision they will make. Be sure to examine your own feelings. If the situation touches on something that evokes a past trauma or you simply are not comfortable aiding the student, find someone who is able and willing.

**Confidentiality:** Never divulge the person's situation to others. If you break their confidence and this becomes known to the person you are trying to help, you may never be able to recover that same level of trust. Remember, *"What is said here stays here unless someone is in danger to themselves or others"* (refer to the Sigma Chi Statement of Position on Confidentiality at <http://sigmachio.org/confidentialityposition>).

If there is a crisis or you feel a student is in immediate danger to themselves or others, call 911. If the issue is beyond your ability, encourage the individual to seek professional help and resources.

## **Additional Resources:**

- Sigma Chi Reach Out app
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800-273-8255
- The Trevor Project/LGBTQ Support: 866-488-7386

# FOUR STEPS TO HELPING A HURTING BROTHER

## **Step 1: Environment and Time**

Ensure that you're in a quiet safe space and have time to discuss the situation and establish if there are any time limitations. Say, *"I would love to listen to your concern right now and help how I can; however, we might need to follow up again later because we only have \_\_\_\_\_ amount of time."*

## **Step 2: Assess Your Own Readiness to Help**

- Are you comfortable with the topic area?
- Do you have strong feelings about the topic?
- Are you personally dealing with something that may interfere with your ability to hold a helpful conversation?

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## Step 3: Listen and Validate

Oftentimes people who are in pain just want someone to listen. Therapeutic listening involves learning how to ask the right questions, including clarifying questions and statements intended to encourage the student to go deeper and open up. With this process the person may discover, to their surprise, what they really think or feel about the issue you are helping them with. Learn to listen to what the person is saying before considering your response. If you don't know what to say, JUST LISTEN. Being there, even as a silent sounding board, can be very therapeutic. There is no better way to heal than to feel heard. Read some do's and don'ts below.

### Listening and Validating Tips:

Do	Don't
Remember that you're responsible for any future outcome from your advice.	Don't rush to fix the problem. Often, people simply need someone to share their pain for a moment.
Ask open-ended questions and listen for themes. Follow up for more clarity.	Don't share your personal story. This isn't about you.
Reframe the information from your point of view: <i>"What I am hearing you say is ..."</i> <i>"It sounds like what you're saying is ..."</i>	Don't give advice if you think they might misinterpret it or get confused.
Say, <i>"I cannot imagine what that is like. You must be incredibly strong to be dealing with this ..."</i>	Don't say, <i>"I know how you feel. (Insert scenario) happened to me ..."</i>
Maintain eye contact, nod, smile, and keep your arms open rather than crossed.	Don't say, <i>"You shouldn't feel bad ..."</i> or <i>"You're overreacting. This isn't a big deal ..."</i>
Offer referrals and resources. You don't have to help all by yourself.	Don't assume that they're OK, and don't wait for a crisis. Deescalate the situation and offer help.
Empower them to seek friends, family, religion or resources for help. Ask them to identify someone they can trust for support and encourage them to reach out.	Don't offer advice unless it is specifically requested. Remember that what works for you may not work for everyone, and we're not the experts on others' lives.

## Step 4: Collaborate and Find Solutions

- Restate the concern as you understand it, develop options together, and make a plan for next steps. This could include a referral to additional ongoing support services like counseling.
- Help them identify someone close to them with whom they can confide in and identify a safety plan. Ask, *"Whom will you call or talk to if you start to feel this way again? What is your plan to stay safe after our conversation?"*
- If you feel you are unable to help and/or see warning signs of a crisis ...
  - Continue to listen; do not flee from the situation.
  - Say, *"I am willing to listen, but I think we may benefit from the help of a professional. Let's find some counseling resources to help with this situation."*

## SUICIDE PREVENTION TRAINING BRIEF

**Question:** Don't shy away from asking the hard questions. Often, not talking about it is more dangerous. Chances are you won't be putting any ideas in their head. You need them to tell the truth to get help.

**Ask:** *"Are you thinking about ending your life?"*

- If they say yes, assess if they have 1) a plan and 2) the means to move forward with their plan.
- If they have both a plan and a way to complete their plan, then call 911 immediately. If they don't have a detailed plan and the tools to do it, then you can safely deescalate the situation and get them counseling resources.

**Persuade:** As helpers we are not trained professionals, so we cannot offer therapy or interventions, but we can persuade them to seek professional help. Say, *"I will be by your side on this journey. Let's go visit the wellness center and set up an appointment right now."*

- Offer to stay with them, walk them to a professional, or make the appointment with them.
- Persuade them to see the value in working through this difficult time in their lives. Empower them to seek help.

**Refer:** Offer referrals to hotlines, apps, chat rooms, support groups, etc. Keep the phone numbers listed above in the Additional Resources section in your phone at all times for easy support.