Sarah's Helping Hand

You have been provided this card as you are living with someone who is currently depressed or distressed.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde

Some Things We Think Help, But Actually Don't:

1. Questioning - asking "why are you depressed?"

Our intention is to help of course, but when a person is depressed, they often ask themselves "Why?" Their minds are a bit like Google in that when they ask their brain a question it always answers.

The effect on our loved one: unfortunately, depressed brains are in 'depressed mode' and give bleak answers. The brain will have negative memories, negative feelings about self, and negative predictions for the future. A likely train of thought could be "I'm depressed because I've always been depressed. There is something wrong with me", "I'm bad, weak, worthless or a failure and there is no hope for my future".

2. Pointing Out The Reasons To Be Happy - Listing things:

Like "You have friends, house, job, money and partner. You have got so much going for you."

Our intention is to help them "snap out of it" and realise all the positives in their lives.

The effect on our loved one: it can make them feel that there really must be something very wrong because despite all these positives they still feel so dreadful.

3. Offering Solutions - Providing answers or remedies.

Our intention is to promote positive change e.g. "I had a friend who was really depressed. They started yoga and that really helped" or "when I get down, I go for a run".

The effect on our loved one: often depressed people know what they need to do but feel extremely tired and have no motivation. Hearing this can make them feel they are failing or letting us down. It is ok, of course, if they ask us what we think may help.

4. Criticising Them - saying things like "nothing's going to improve if you continue like this."

Our intention is to promote some type of reaction and change.

The effect on our loved one: they may feel guilt and shame, making it less likely they will approach us in the future.

5. Avoiding Their Feelings - we sometimes pretend we haven't noticed they are upset or anxious.

Our intention is not to make them feel worse, so we choose to overlook their feelings.

The effect on our loved one: they could feel it's a side of them we don't like. They could feel isolated and not accepted for who they are.

6. Overprotecting Them - When we do everything for them.

Our intention is to reduce the burden and make life simple for them.

The effect on our loved one: this could remove their independence, which involves self-direction, self-determination and autonomy - three crucial factors linked with positive mental health.

7. Highlighting Your Own Feelings - Saying things like "Have you any idea how this makes me and the rest of us feel?"

Our intention is to promote change as we are desperate to make them feel better.

The effect on our loved one: feelings of guilt, shame, isolation and humiliation.

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So What Should We Try to Do?

1. Start With Ourselves

To whoever is reading this, the fact you are reading this shows you care.

You are important, you matter and you deserve compassion. Caring for someone in distress is extremely hard.

Recognise and acknowledge y our own feelings to begin with, for example, " I'm feeling angry right now", or " really scared of what's happening". Think of it like your safety on a plane and put your own oxygen mask on first.

Accept your feelings - There are no such things as wrong feelings, only an incorrect interpretation of events that may have led to them or unhelpful behaviors because of them. It's ok to feel whatever you are feeling and it's ok not to like how it feels.

Having a friend or loved one who's suffering is deeply difficult. **Everyone** finds it difficult. It's difficult because Y**ou Care**. When we experience strong emotions, be prepared to take a step back before speaking.
Sometimes engaging in too much dialogue is not the best approach.

2. Listen To Your Loved One

Simply listen with no agenda to change them. As the song says, "You say it best when you say nothing at all". Communication can be nonverbal. A reassuring look, a touch or a smile can show them that it's ok. What you are saying is "I'm not going anywhere" "You are safe" "You are enough'.

3. Show Empathy

Empathy is "meeting the other where they are".

Your loved one might be in a very dark place, and it takes enormous courage for you to be alongside them. Being there allows them to feel heard and understood. Responding using similar vocabulary echoes their language and makes the distressed person feel like they are being listened to. We can acknowledge their situation by simply saying "It is so hard for you" or "It is so difficult to feel this way. "or "it sounds so tough for you right now" or "I am here for you".

♥ Remember, Sarah is by your side ♥

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