

5 STEPS FOR MINISTERING TO MEMBERS EXPERIENCING EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

(WSRS Family Services- Europe Area)

During difficult situations, it's important for us to support and strengthen each other. Consider these 5 steps when ministering to others during difficult times.

1. Lead with COMPASSION

"...have compassion, making a difference" (Jude 1:22)

Show that you care. You might say things like:

- "We love you."
- "I feel compassion for what you are experiencing."
- "You are in my thoughts and prayers."
- "I'm here for you, and I can listen." (It's OK to just sit quietly with the person. Just being there offers support.)

2. Allow expressions of THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

Ask questions to help others describe their experiences but avoid forcing them to talk about feelings or subjects they aren't ready to discuss. You might consider questions like:

- "What worries you the most right now?"
- "What keeps you going?"
- "What are the hardest challenges you have faced this week?"
- "What strengths do you see in yourself and others?"
- "What concerns do you have about the future?"
- "How does your faith help?"
- "Is there anything about your past that is troubling you?"
- "Would you share about a time when you experienced healing in your life?"

3. Seek to understand and express EMPATHY

Show that you are trying to understand their unique experiences and help them feel it's all right to not be OK right now. You might say things like:

- "I don't fully understand the pain you are feeling, but I know that this must be hard."
- "It's OK to feel whatever emotions you are feeling."
- "It's normal to feel like our thoughts and emotions are beyond our control."
- "Everyone responds differently—it's OK to feel strong and like you're doing well, and it is OK to struggle."

If they have difficulty with sleep, headaches, stomachaches, appetite, daily routines, and spiritual practices, help them know that it is normal to struggle. Help them be patient and gracious with themselves while they work to recover.

4. Discuss personal care options and suggest WAYS TO COPE

If others want or need ideas for how to manage emotions and stress, you can refer to the *Facing Challenges: A Self-Help Guide*, and discuss some of these practical ideas:

- Taking time to take care of themselves, including proper nutrition, hydration, hygiene, exercise, sleep, and prescribed medications
- Providing service to others as they are able
- Learning mindfulness, meditation, or breathing exercises
- Facing life one day, hour, or minute at a time

You might ask questions like:

- “What are your coping strategies?”
- “What has helped you cope with difficulties in the past?”
- “How are you taking care of your physical health as well as your emotional health?”
- “How is your faith helping you?”
- “How are you relying upon the Lord?”

5. Offer HOPE

In emotional distress situations, deep expressions of faith and hope can often feel trite or not helpful. Consider hopeful statements like:

- “I’m here with you and for you.”
- “I know people who can help.”
- “I’ll keep checking in with you.”
- “I’ll give you the space that you need. I’ll also be available to help and be with you.”

If distressing thoughts, behaviors, and emotions persist, continue to respond with ministering compassion and invite the person to seek professional help.

Ministering in crisis manual (available in 14 languages in each WSRS country portal):

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