



Communicating Compassionately: How to Speak to a Trauma Survivor

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In a world where trauma is unfortunately prevalent, knowing how to communicate effectively and compassionately with trauma survivors is an essential skill. Whether it's a friend, family member, colleague, or even yourself, understanding the nuances of communication can make a significant difference in offering support and fostering healing. Here are some key guidelines to consider when engaging in conversations with trauma survivors.

1. *Listen with Empathy:* One of the most important aspects of speaking to a trauma survivor is actively listening to them with empathy. Allow them to share their experiences at their own pace, without interruption or judgment. Validate their emotions and let them know that their feelings are valid and respected.
2. *Use Non-verbal Cues:* Non-verbal communication can speak volumes, especially when words may fail to express the depth of understanding and support. Maintain eye contact (if culturally appropriate), nod your head to show you're listening, and offer a comforting touch if appropriate and welcomed. Your body language can convey warmth and reassurance.
3. *Practice Patience:* Trauma recovery is a journey that takes time, and survivors may need to revisit and process their experiences multiple times. Be patient and understanding, even if it seems like they are repeating themselves. Avoid rushing or pressuring them to move on before they are ready.
4. *Respect Boundaries:* It's crucial to respect the survivor's boundaries and avoid prying into details they're not comfortable sharing. Let them dictate the pace and depth of the conversation, and refrain from asking probing questions that may trigger distressing memories.
5. *Avoid Making Assumptions or Offering Unsolicited Advice:* Every individual's experience with trauma is unique, so avoid making assumptions about how they should feel or react. Refrain from offering unsolicited advice or trying to "fix" their problems. Instead, focus on offering support and understanding.
6. *Be Mindful of Triggers:* Certain words, topics, or situations can act as triggers for trauma survivors, causing them to relive painful memories or experiences. Pay attention to cues that indicate discomfort, and be prepared to change the subject or offer reassurance if needed.
7. *Use Empowering Language:* Encourage the survivor to reclaim their sense of agency and autonomy by using empowering language. Instead of framing them as victims, acknowledge their strength and resilience in coping with their experiences.
8. *Offer Resources and Support:* Let the survivor know that they are not alone and that there are resources available to help them on their healing journey. This could include therapy, support groups, hotlines, or other community resources tailored to their specific needs.
9. *Practice Self-Care:* Supporting a trauma survivor can be emotionally draining, so it's essential to prioritize self-care. Set boundaries for yourself, seek support from friends or professionals if needed, and engage in activities that replenish your energy and resilience.
10. *Educate Yourself:* Continuously educate yourself about trauma and its effects to deepen your understanding and empathy. By learning more about trauma-informed communication, you can better support survivors and contribute to creating a more compassionate and empathetic society.

Speaking to a trauma survivor requires compassion, patience, and understanding. By actively listening, respecting boundaries, and offering support without judgment, you can help create a safe and nurturing environment for healing and recovery. Trauma survivors deserve to be heard, validated, and supported on their journey towards healing and resilience.

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