

So, You'd Like to Help

Karen Carr, MMCT

Traumas are life changing events. The person you know and want to help will experience normal trauma responses that can be confusing and distressing (See the handout entitled Common Post-Trauma Reactions and Symptoms). Below you will find some guidelines for ways to support and help someone who has been through a trauma.

- Be present and available
- Invite them to share what happened without pressuring
- Listen well without offering solutions, advice, or "quick fix"
- Let them talk as much as they need to (even if you've heard it before)
- Help them to establish routine, set small goals, and engage with others
- Allow them to express fear and anger without judgment
- Allow them to ask searching spiritual questions without feeling the need to provide an answer (you don't have it)
- Educate yourself about traumatic reactions
- Provide loving feedback when they are unrealistic, engaging in risky behaviors, making unwise decisions, or not taking care of themselves
- Be a buffer between them and those who are merely curious or who cannot offer legitimate help (though it may be sincere)
- Say things like "I went through something similar and I felt

 - How is it effecting you?" rather than "I know how you feel"
 - Resist the temptation to say things like, "If it had been me, I would have..." or "I never would have done that...."
 - Instill hope, but don't give false promises
Avoid minimizing or making light of what has happened
 - Avoid spiritualizing

Finally, get support for yourself. It is very stressful and difficult to see someone you care about hurting. You may hear about traumatic details that "stick" with you. Make sure that you have a good support and care plan for yourself.