

# Healthy Workplace – How to Listen to Someone Who is Hurting

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## Washington State Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

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Whenever people face bereavement, injury, or other kinds of trauma, they often need to talk about it in order to heal. To talk, they need willing listeners.

Unfortunately, many of us shrink from listening to people in pain, We may feel like we have enough troubles of our own, be afraid of making matters worse by saying the wrong thing, or just wonder if we are the appropriate person.

It is natural to feel reluctant or even afraid of facing another person's painful feelings. But it is important not to let this fear prevent us from doing what we can to help someone we supervise or work with.

Your EAP can help coach you through any kind of difficult conversation. Though each situation is unique, some guidelines can help make the process easier.

- The most important thing to do is simply to be there, listen and show that you care.
- Find a private setting. Keep your comments brief and simple.
- Ask questions which show your interest and encourages the employee to talk.
- Give verbal and non-verbal messages of caring and support.
- Understand that employees will react to a situation in different ways as emotions are rarely simple and often can include the pain of past experiences.
- Give advice only if it is solicited and appropriate to your role.
- Don't turn the conversation into a forum of your own experiences. If you have had a similar experience you might think to mention it briefly when the moment seems right but avoid saying things like "I know exactly how you feel."
- Listening might give you information that you want to follow up on later.

When you are finished it may be appropriate to ask if there is someone outside of work that the employee can call for support. Is there is any assistance that they might need with their immediate workload? You can suggest an appointment by telephone or in person with one of the professional staff at the Employee Assistance Program.

Having a conversation with someone who is emotionally distraught or upset can be draining so please consider using EAP to "de-brief" the experience yourself.