

How not to give advice – in 7 steps

Please give me some good advice in your next letter. I promise not to follow it. — Edna St. Vincent Millay

The people sensible enough to give good advice are usually sensible enough to give none. — Eden Phillpotts

If you listen too much to advice, you may wind up making other people's mistakes. — Croft M. Pentz

Free advice is not always worth the price. — Julie Shea

I'll give you the same advice I give my children: Never take advice from anybody. — Robert Altman



As the above quotes show, advice is not often welcome in a conversation. There are ways, however, to help a friend without giving any advice. The following seven steps will show them you care and recognize they are able to make their own decisions, without lecturing them.

1 Most people don't need us to talk but **listen**. Just being there for a friend can help them. It is easier to go through difficult times with somebody by your side.

2 Find a way to express your **empathy**. For example, tell your friend "I see how the situation is hard for you", "I'm sorry you have to go through this", or "Sounds tough to handle". Of course, it is important that you really try to understand them.

3 While doing this, **never be certain** you know everything. Recognize that none of us can fully grasp what is going on in another person's life. You can also show this by starting sentences with: "Correct me if I'm wrong...", "Are you saying...", or "Am I right when I think..."

4 Instead of theorizing or speaking in too general terms, tell the friend a **short story** about a similar situation that you or another one of your friends went through. The stress is on the “short” part – you should want to listen more than speak.

5 Give the friend a broader **perspective**. Ask them to think about consequences of their own decisions in the long run. How will they feel about something in a week, month, or a year? If it is possible, you can also try to show them another person’s perspective.

6 If you think your friend is right, always let them know. It helps people a lot to hear their feelings are **appreciated**.

7 Ask your friend for ways in which you can **help**. Of course, also explain what type of help you are able to give, so that you are not drained and overwhelmed by other people’s problems.

Adapted from www.psychologytoday.com



Tasks:

1) Think of a time when somebody came to you with a problem. Did you respond in any of the ways described? If yes, which one(s)? If not, what would have been a good response?

2) Role-play in pairs. One person thinks of a real or imagined problem. The other tries to respond with as many of the above steps as possible. Then they exchange roles.