Words of kindness and comfort

**Group size**

Pairs

**Suggested timing**

30 - 45 minutes

**Method**

Practise

Learning objectives

**What you need**

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**Words of kindness – practise - role and story cards**

**Supporting someone who is upset teaching guidance**

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**PowerPoint**

* Discuss words of kindness and comforting others
* Apply knowledge of words of kindness and comforting others to a known role play

## Overview

In pairs, learners play different roles to explore how to support someone who is upset. Each pair is given a person who is upset scenario card, and the child playing the role of the helper has to demonstrate how they’d comfort them, while the other child in the role of coach watches and then offers feedback. This activity might work best with older learners.

Preparation

Print out enough of the Words of kindness practise - role and story cards for each pair or display on the PowerPoint. Read through the Supporting someone who is upset teaching guidance below as background information before running this activity.

Follow these tips on how to best help someone in need. This can help you deal with learners’ questions and understand the guidance on the activity for the helpers and coaches.

**How do you help someone who is upset?**

Good listening is a very good start. It is harder and rarer than a lot of people think. Some ideas are:

* Start by assessing if the situation is safe for you to help and evaluating what you think has happened.
* Make sure you are in a state where you can help. Are you shaken by what happened too? If so, take a moment or have someone else help. Take care of yourself too.
* Introduce yourself and be friendly.
* Ask what has happened and what they need.
* Be patient, bear in mind that they might not be able to explain themselves straight away.
* Give people time to talk.
* Give them space and don't crowd them.
* Make eye contact appropriately but don't stare.
* Be physically still and relaxed - not agitated or using sudden body movements.
* When you talk, use a calm voice – don't shout or whisper and don't interrupt.
* It is best to avoid false reassurance such as, "everything will be okay". After all, it might not be. And even if it is, that may not be how the person is feeling at that moment.
* Offer non-verbal encouragement using phrases like, "mmm" and so on. This indicates that you are listening and are happy to hear what the person is saying.
* A good way to show you have understood is to reflect out loud on what the person has said. You could say, for example, “so, you’re very worried about that”.

**What are things to avoid?**

Here are some basic mistakes to steer clear of:

* Don't try to jolly people up or try to get them to see the funny side. Your task is to respect how they're feeling now and help them deal with it, not suppress it.
* Don't say things like, "I know just how you are feeling, the same thing happened to me". This isn't empathy, it is more like boasting. It is alienating and irritating.
* Don't hurry the next action. Always remember that a person who is upset is vulnerable and probably not in a state for successful decision-making.
* Don’t hug them, it might not make them feel better and there are other ways to comfort someone.

Credits

These tips are based on research and development work by Dr Sarah Davidson and was written by PJ White and Dr Sarah Davidson. It was produced in March 2009. The classroom activity was published in December 2011. It was reviewed in June 2021.

## How to run the activity

1. Begin by asking learners to demonstrate some words of comfort. What could people say to help those who are upset?
2. Explain to the learners that they will be working in groups to explore how best to support someone who is upset and needs kindness.
3. Split into groups of two. Give each group a set of Words of kindness practise - role and story cards or display in the PowerPoint.
4. Explain that each learner will take a turn in each role: a helper, and a coach. *Allow time for the learners to read their role cards, or you can discuss these as a whole group, before splitting into smaller groups.*
5. Read the role play to hear about the person who is upset. The helper should then say or role play what they would do. The coach should observe.
6. After the conversation has taken place, the coach looks at their role card and offers some supportive ideas to the helper about how they could help the upset person further.
7. Once this is complete ask the pair to swap roles. This time they could choose a new scenario card. They should repeat the above steps, trying out different roles.
8. Once this is complete, ask the pair to choose a new character card, and run through the activity again, trying the both roles.
9. Once the role-plays are complete - time allowing - ask a few groups to show one of their role-plays to the whole group.
10. Prompt the group to discuss what worked well in the role-play and any ideas they might have for helping someone who is upset.
11. Remember to help the children to come out of character, you can learn more about how to do this in the resource [Creating a safe, inclusive and supportive learning environment](https://firstaidchampions.redcross.org.uk/primary/guidance-and-support/).

Summing up

Ask learners to think about:

* What are the most important things to do when supporting someone who is upset?
* How did it feel to play each of the roles?
* How did it make you feel when you were the helper?
* How might the helper look after themselves afterwards, to make sure they aren’t negatively affected by what has happened?
* How might you use what you have learned from this activity?