

## Tips for Helping a Friend in Need | Tina Shorey & Lynee Hamm

Everyone who has friends (and we do hope that you are overflowing with friends!) has likely encountered times when a friend was in need. But it isn't always easy to know how to help in a way that is meaningful and, well, helpful! Hopefully the following tips will give you ideas for the next time a friend in need comes knocking at your door!

### 1. Listen!

Yes this seems a bit obvious but keep reading! Everyone has a story to tell. And sometimes telling the story is all that is important. Listening well takes practice though! Here are a few things to consider...

- A.) **Be a Patient Listener.** There is no time limit on telling a story. Many times repeating and rehashing are the only ways to come to terms with a problem.
- B.) **Don't Be a Savior.** It is tempting to hear a friend's problem and immediately start making plans to save them from the distressing event. A better approach is to listen carefully. Sometimes talking out loud brings everything into focus. Be encouraging and if appropriate, offer ideas for possible solutions or present a different way of viewing the situation (just don't be critical!). Don't be irritated if your friend doesn't take your advice. You are not walking her journey for her; you are supporting her as she walks.
- C.) **Be a Safe Friend.** We aren't implying you are abusive! Being safe means: not being judgmental, being respectful of the other person and her feelings, keeping conversations confidential, and allowing your friend the space and time needed to heal.

### 2. Support

Supporting a friend in need takes many forms. Learn to 'read between the lines' and think of creative ways to be a supportive friend.

- A.) **Emotional and Spiritual support:** listen, think of ways to let your friend know you are thinking of her throughout the week or during an especially difficult time; surprise her with a small token of friendship, share resources or materials that you have found comforting; above all pray! Add your friend to your daily prayers, and pray with her as well. Assure her that Abba is near, He is listening, and He cares.
- B.) **Physical Support:** sometimes helping out with physical needs is most helpful. Offering to watch children, doing dishes, making and delivering a meal, dropping off a box of chocolate (yes, we consider this support!), running errands, or helping your friend complete a task are all great ways to support her physically.
- C.) **Social Support:** many times when a friend is going through a particularly bad time people start pulling away. Perhaps they feel uncomfortable, don't know how to help, or just don't want to get involved. We can assure you that pulling away from a friend in need is NOT a good way to help. And, it isn't Biblical! Remember, we are all Abba's daughters. And He designed us to thrive on love and support! Make an extra effort to include your friend in activities and events. Sometimes the diversion is welcome. Other times it won't be. Don't be offended. Just keep reaching out with love, letting your friend know that she is being thought of and included.

### 3. Be Vulnerable

We know! This sounds crazy! BUT, being willing to open up and share some of your struggles and resulting insights (don't be preachy!) helps your friend see that she is not alone, weird, different from everyone else. It is comforting to know that other people struggle with similar problems.

- A.) Don't create a negativity-fest. Talking about problems with others sometimes turns into a good old fashioned session of complaining. You are supporting your friend, not trying to drag her into a black hole! Think of healthy ways that you got through the problem, or share activities that were a comfort or provided strength.
- B.) Don't Be a Know-It-All. Sounds harsh, but true! Sometimes we come across as having all the answers and right words for a situation. It is okay to say things like "I don't know". It is okay to be silent. It is okay to recognize the inability to solve the problem. In fact, it is more than okay! Because when we reach that point Abba is very near. Why? Because He wants us to remember that we can't have all the answers, but He does! "Be still and know that I am God" Psalm 46:10. Abba wants us to lean into him when the journey becomes hard.
- C.) Be Patient. With yourself, that is! It takes courage to be vulnerable. And, you need to gauge just how vulnerable to be with each friend. Don't turn up the volume on your inner critic! Be a friend, but don't beat yourself up when things don't go as well as you would like.

#### 4. Take Care

Caring for friends in need uses energy. Don't become so enmeshed in your friend's problem that you forget to take care of yourself.

- A.) Remember The Basics. Good nutrition, exercise, sleep, quiet time, and God time are all vital. If you don't care for yourself, you will be less effective at caring for others.
- B.) Take a Break. Sometimes a friend's problem becomes overwhelming. Or tiring. Or frustrating. It's okay to admit that. You aren't being less of a friend for feeling this way. Take a break. Do an activity you enjoy. Make sure you are taking care of your emotional needs.
- C.) Ask for Help. Abba is the first place to turn both with problems and praises. But sometimes a friend's situation has you concerned, puzzled, or frustrated. Seeking out wise counsel from a trained therapist, a pastor, or other trusted person will provide you with support and possibly another way of looking at things. Remember to keep conversations as generic as possible as you don't want to betray trust with your friend.

**A beautiful fragrance makes a person happy. But, the sweetness of a friend is refreshing to the soul. Proverbs 27:9**