

“Feelings Validated Here”

How to be a Coping Coach

Ronald R. Brill, Emotional Health Education © 2013

1. Understand that emotional distress, problem behavior and harmful behavior toward self or others often follow a person’s painful experiences. And recognize that emotional pain triggers impulses from the pre-verbal, instinctive levels of the brain.
2. Encourage "hurting persons" to name their pain. This is how “thinking brain” takes control of their recovery. It’s an antidote to blaming others and shaming yourself. Pain is painful. “There is nothing wrong with you that your coping skills can’t fix.”
3. By listening and “mirroring” -- restating what they say -- you VALIDATE a person’s feelings. If we distract them away from their feelings it diminishes their human capability for self-healing.
4. Tell the "hurting person" you care about how they feel and are sorry they are hurting. Listen without interrupting or making judgments. Just talking about hurt feelings helps them to be OK.
5. Don’t say “Oh, that’s nothing;” “You’ll get over it;” or expect a student to forget an emotionally painful experience without applying healthy coping skills. Recovery from repeated emotional wounds, just like a physical injury, can take time.
6. Remind the "hurting person" that getting over hurt feelings is how we build resilience. The more we practice coping with stress the easier it gets. Instinctive brain impulses can make us feel helpless, but our thinking brain helps us recognize loss, rejection, betrayal, or humiliation is part of life that we need to cope with.
7. Do not attempt to impose your explanation on what the "hurting person" is feeling. Everyone needs to take responsibility for “owning,” naming and reframing the resulting painful feelings.

The Benefits of Being a Coping Coach

1. Being a Coping Coach not only can help others, but strengthens your relationships by creating a bond of trust with those who may feel vulnerable, powerless and helpless in their ability to deal with their pain or distress.
2. A Coping Coach is a special kind of friend who assures a person you will be with them as they work through a stressful time.
3. Coping Coaches help kids to build confidence in their own problem-solving ability. You offer tools and encouragement rather than doing the work for them. You're main purpose is to develop students' capability for self-management and resilience.
4. A Coping Coach may not have to say anything to be effective. Just being a respectful listener "honors" others' feelings -- an important factor in helping others in their healing process.
5. Coping Coaches themselves don't always feel capable of handling every distressing experience. One way to create mutual trust is to acknowledge to a "hurting person" that sometimes it's hard to get over your own painful experiences; and it takes time.
6. A Coping Coach does not need to be a "fixer" or miracle worker. You are just someone who cares about what another person feels. Because your main job is to VALIDATE FEELINGS you will leave the healing in the hands of the "hurting person." Any skill requires practicing. Both Coaches and those they help build stronger coping skills by continuing to practice using them.
7. Coping Coaches benefit from their experiences in many ways, including being valued as an understanding and caring person.

Thanks. Our world needs lots more people like you!