

## Making a Difference

**I've read a lot of your articles about teenagers that are struggling and I know there are a lot of my friends that do. I guess I'm blessed because I haven't had to deal with a lot of those things. What's someone like me supposed to do to help them and maybe even help other people who need it?**

It's so awesome that you realize how blessed you are and are willing to make a difference. In today's world there are many things that affect teenagers: peer pressure, drugs, alcohol, cutting, poor self-image, eating disorders, and so on. There are a lot of hurting people who need others like you who are willing to extend a hand in friendship.

The first rule of thumb for anyone wanting to help others is not necessarily to just do, but to be. What does that mean? Well, it means a lot of things: be there, be willing to just listen, be available, be real, be patient, be trustworthy, be loving, be an example, and be the friend you want others to be to you.

Being a real friend involves more than just hanging out and having fun. It means you are willing to take risks and become a part of someone's life. We have many young people who write to us with their problems and tell us that they haven't confided in anyone else besides us. We always try to get them to talk to someone, and when asked if they would be willing to open up to their friends about it, they often tell us that many of their friends don't talk about deep personal issues. They may talk about problems they have with parents or other friends, but when it comes to issues they're dealing with personally (anorexia, cutting, low self-image, suicidal thoughts, etc...), they often keep it a secret because of shame or fear of others' reactions. However, if a friend lovingly probes and expresses concern and unconditional care for the other, they are much more apt to open up.

So, rule number one... Be.

Rule number two... Do.

Yes, it's most important to be all those things mentioned above. But eventually, the doing part has to happen too. For your friends, this may mean calling just to tell them you care, sending a card, reminding them that you're there for them, and agreeing to hold them accountable. Don't be afraid to ask the difficult questions, and keep asking! It shows you care. Don't just assume that because your friend was doing better with their problem of cutting three months ago, for example, that he isn't struggling with it now. These types of problems often go in cycles. If your friend has struggled with a certain behavior, be specific when talking with them. Don't just ask, "How are you doing?" It will only result in a typical answer of "fine." Rather, ask detailed questions about their specific struggle.

Try to get your friends involved in community activities and events. Often times, those who have a lot of problems in life can benefit from helping others and gaining a perspective on how others are hurting as well. It helps them not feel so alone and allows them to focus their energy on helping others with problems instead of focusing so much on their own. Perhaps your church youth group has some service projects to get involved in. Your friends aren't into the church thing? Well, find something your group does that focuses more on an activity; maybe a concert, play or game night. These are often less threatening and are great ice-breakers for newcomers.

If you're really on the adventurous side and are ready to not just help your friends, but your world too, we'd like to suggest that you go on a mission trip. Your church or a community organization may have short-term mission opportunities, so ask! There are many state-side trips that may last only a few days or international trips that may last a couple weeks. Visiting an underprivileged community or foreign country will change your life forever. You'll gain an amazing appreciation of life and be stretched in your character and faith.

Before we can impact our world, we need to look at ourselves and make sure we are reflecting the character and values we want to see in the world.

"Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself." – Leo Tolstoy

Articles are written by Bob Lenz, Tiffany Thompson and other national youth communicators with Life Promotions Inc., a non-profit youth organization committed to instilling hope, worth and value in youth.

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