

Responding in Challenging Moments

- **Be in the Right Mindset.** We can only be helpful when we are in the Right Mindset. This can be particularly difficult in challenging, uncertain moments. You are in the Right Mindset when you can answer “yes” to the **Mindset3** questions:
 - Am I assuming this person has the best intentions?
 - Do I notice that this person is doing the best they can with what they’ve got?
 - Am I owning what I am responsible for and letting go of what I cannot control?
- **Listen.** People want to be heard and understood. This is of the utmost importance; it is impossible to respond to concerns if we do not know what the concerns are. Listen to understand. Use non-verbals, such as head nods, facial expressions, eye contact, and open body language to indicate that you are listening and following.
- **Validate.** Often our negative emotions, primarily fear, are driving our behaviors during these moments. Emotions have one need: to be experienced. Once that occurs, they will most often start to dissipate. Name the emotions you are seeing in the person; help to normalize their emotional experience. This is often the most helpful anyone can do. Examples:
 - “I understand how scary this situation is right now.”
 - “You’re feeling ____, and that’s completely expected given the situation.”
 - “All of the uncertainty right now is a lot to handle.”
 - “This is all overwhelming.”
- **Be curious.** Do not assume. Ask questions and clarify. Use simple encouraging probes to invite them to share more, such as, “Say more,” “Tell me more,” and “Keep talking.” This not only indicates that you are there to listen and understand, it encourages them to keep talking and processing.
- **The Next Right Thing.** Emotions, uncertainty, fear, anxiety, unknown – all of these factors can overwhelm us. Helping people slow down and focus their energy can be grounding and effective. After validating where they are, ask, “What’s the next right thing?” And then help them figure that out. Take “next” as literal; it may be washing their hands, taking a break to breathe, or responding to a message. Simple, small, and achievable – this helps to ground people and help them realize that they have some agency and security to handle the situation.