

Tips for Talking About Sensitive Issues

Do this:

Levels of emotional safety are directly tied to acceptance. If emotional safety is lost, the passport into that person's heart is also lost. So keep a calm exterior, even when you don't feel calm.

Communicate complete acceptance and lack of shame. This restates the gospel: "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). His kindness leads to repentance (Romans 2:4).

Acceptance of a person is separate from accepting sin. God welcomes the dirty, unfaithful, and messy. Long before people

are hurting, they know whether we're safe by how we respond to others and to less sensitive issues.

Trust God patiently even if the results you want don't happen in one conversation.

Use fewer words, a calm voice, and lots of space and waiting between words.

Sympathy is key. (Adding to drama is not.) Observe messages sent by tone and body language of both of you.

Reflect to them what you think they're saying. Then, "Am I getting you?"

Ask this:

What emotions and events do you associate with this struggle? What is/was this like for you?

What do you wish I would understand?

What are you afraid will happen? What do you want most to protect, or just avoid?

What do you feel like doing?

What do you think God thinks of all this—and wants you to do?

As Jesus demonstrated (with Nicodemus, the woman at the well, and the blind man in John 9), much of healing starts with careful listening. **Try these tips toward listening well.**

More than a problem being fixed, **prioritize that the speaker feels heard, received, and understood.**

Refrain from

- Interrupting.
- Giving non-individualized, cliché, or pat answers.
- Finishing sentences.
- Talking immediately after they stop.
- Planning your responses rather than listening (see Proverbs 18:2,13).
- Proving yourself as wise or helpful.

Ask thoughtful, nurturing questions.

Ideally, the person walks away feeling your listening gave them a better understanding of themselves.