

# How to Give Advice

Giving advice is not one of the easiest tasks. You can be put under a lot of pressure, especially if you generally (unintentionally) give bad advice. With these tips, you'll be a pro at giving advice in no time! Get started with Step 1...

Part 1 of 4:

## Acting Right



**Don't judge them.** The first, most basic step in giving good advice (or any at all really) is to not judge the other person.<sup>[1]</sup> No one should be thought of as less or as bad for a single decision that they made. We're all playing with a different set of cards and what you have in your hand and what you managed to do with it doesn't have anything to do with what someone else has.

1. Keep a straight face and remember what your mother taught you: if you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all.

2.



**Remove your bias.** We of course all have our own opinions on what is and isn't right or what someone should do, but when you give advice, the idea is to give someone the tools to make their own decision, not make the decision for them. Try to remove your own opinions from the conversation and just focus on helping them come to their own conclusion.<sup>[2]</sup>

1. For example, if your friend is considering an abortion but you don't believe in it, don't spend the whole time telling her how bad it is. Instead, talk her through the arguments that you know of for and against it, in equal balance.
2. Only when someone asks you "What would you do?" should you let your own personal opinion shine through. Just make sure that you give the reasons why you have the opinion that you do, so that they can understand your logic.

3.



**Be honest.** Let them know if you're not an expert. You don't have to be a lot of the time, since all they really need is a sounding board. But it's important that you don't give them the impression that you're an

authority when you're not.<sup>[3]</sup>

1. It's okay to **not say** "I know how you feel", too. Instead, say something like "You're right to be upset about that" or "I can see how that would make me feel neglected".

4.



**Express confidence in them.** Sometimes all someone needs to make the right decision is to know that someone believes in them and that someone thinks that they can do the right thing. Be that person for them, especially if no one else can be. Tell them something like, "This is a really tough decision, but I know you want to do the right thing. And I know you will do the right thing. You just have to let all that bravery that I know you have shine through."<sup>[4]</sup>

5.



**Know when it's appropriate and when it's inappropriate to stage an intervention.** An intervention is when you give someone advice that didn't ask for it and probably doesn't want it. This can often be done with several other friends and family members of that person backing you up but it can also be done just on your own. Of course, it's important to know when you should and shouldn't intervene and give someone

advice that they don't want. Generally, you should reserve this only for when you are worried that someone is a danger to themselves or others.<sup>[5]</sup>

1. If it's just something like keeping a boyfriend you don't approve of because of his personality or religion, that's not a good reason. However, if you're worried that your friend is being physically abused by the boyfriend because she shows up to school with bruises, this is a good time to get involved.
2. Sometimes a firm hand is what is needed to get someone to make the right choice but often this can make someone more defensive. This is a very tricky situation and you might be gambling a bit.

Part 2 of 4:

## Listening to Their Story

1.



**Just listen.** When someone is talking and trying to get your advice, start by just listening. A lot of the time, all someone needs is a sounding board. They need to be heard. This gives them the chance to sort out issues for themselves and come to accept a situation in their own mind. Don't talk until they're done, unless they seem to need a direct response. Sometimes if you listen to the whole story you can easily pinpoint the problem.<sup>[6]</sup>

2.



**Don't offer opinions yet.** If they ask for your opinion part-way through the story, give evasive answers and ask to get all of the information first. This is because you need to form a full, informed opinion before you can really give them good advice. They might manipulate the story and try to get an answer from you before you have all the facts, in order to get the answer that they're really hoping for.<sup>[7]</sup>

3.



**Ask lots of questions.** After they tell their story, ask them questions to get more information. This lets you develop a more full, informed opinion, but it can also help them to think about things that they hadn't considered, like alternatives or other points of view.<sup>[8]</sup> Ask questions like:

1. "Why did you say that?"
2. "When did you tell him that?"

4.



**Ask if they even want advice!** One good habit is to ask them if they even want advice. Some people just want to talk and they don't want to be told what to do. If you feel they really need to hear your advice however, let them know it's just a suggestion, and you don't expect them to do it. If they say that they would like advice, give it. If they say no, then just say something like, "Well, if you keep having problems I'm here and happy to help you through it."

Part 3 of 4:

## Giving Good Advice

1.



**Take time to think about the issue, if you can.** If you can have a day or even a few hours to think about their problem and possible solutions, take that time to really think about every possible solution or way of

approaching the problem. You could even take the opportunity to ask someone else for advice, if you know someone who's more knowledgeable on the issue. However, a lot of the time people need immediate help by the time they actually ask for advice, so you might just have to respond to the best of your ability and follow up later.



**Talk them through the hurdles.** Go over with them what that difficult parts of the situation are and why those things pose a problem. Something that they see as an impassable barrier might actually be easy to overcome, with a little outside perspective.<sup>[9]</sup>

1. "So, you want to move but you're worried that it's impossible. What are the things stopping you from moving? You need to find a job first, right? Okay. What else? You can't leave your dad alone here? Right."



**Help them evaluate the problem from the outside.** Sometimes people can't, as they say, see the forest for the trees. They have a hard time seeing the entirety of their situation or even possible solutions because

they're so fixed on a few small problems. Help them take a step back by going over the big picture, from your outsider's perspective.<sup>[10]</sup>

1. For example, if your friend is worried about bringing her new boyfriend to a party because he's older than she is and she doesn't want to be judged, you could point out that she probably won't know anyone at the party anyway so what difference does it make.



**Open them up to all of their options.** Walk them through all of the options that they've thought of. Then, try to think of some new options that they haven't thought of and give them those as well. In this early stage, it's important to try to keep them from crossing out any options, so that all options can be weighed equally and in light of the others.

1. When they're dismissive of options, try to find out the real reason why. Sometimes they may object based on false understandings.
2. Say something like: "So you want to tell your husband that you're pregnant again but you need to do it carefully because money is tough right now. You can wait to tell him until after you find out about this new job or you can tell him now so that he can have more time to look into other options. Have you considered seeing what assistance programs you might qualify for and then talking to him?"

5.



**Help them evaluate those options.** Once everything is on the table, walk through all the options with them and brainstorm the pros and cons together. Between the two of you, you should be able to come up with a less biased picture of what can be done to solve the problem.<sup>[11]</sup>

1. "Telling your boyfriend that you want to get married is an option but knowing him it will just make him feel like you're judging him. Another option would be to double date with me and James. James can have a man-talk with him and maybe try to find out why he's so hesitant."

6.



**Give them what information you can.** If you have any advice from experience or even just more information about what they might expect, give them that information once the options have been discussed. They can then use that extra information to solidify their feelings regarding the options.<sup>[12]</sup>

1. Again, remember to try to keep bias and judgement out of your voice and words when you give them this advice.

7.



**Know when to be tough and when to be soft.** Most of the time people need a positive but motivational pep talk. Sometimes, however, people really need to hear it how it is. Sometimes, people just need a serious kick in the pants. You have to learn to gauge when it's one vs the other, which is tricky. There's no set formula. Generally, when someone is really just hurting themselves and not learning their lesson, that's when it's time to intervene.

1. However, if you don't have a good relationship with this person or if they tend to handle criticism very poorly, telling them what they need to hear might not do your relationship any favors in the short term.
2. Even when you do give someone this helpful nudge, it's important to not just be outright mean.

8.



**Emphasize that you don't control the future.** People, when they seek advice, will often be wanting a guarantee. Remind them that you can't give this, that there's no way to predict the future. Let them see that you are there for them though and that even if things don't turn out like they hope, life will still go on.

## Following Up

1.



**Give them help if they want it.** If they are dealing with a situation where another person can actually do something, such as many interpersonal situations or overwhelming work problems, offer to help them. They will likely refuse, but it's important to follow through if you do offer.<sup>[13]</sup>

1. Of course, if you know you would be terrible at helping them, don't offer your own help but you can offer to help them find someone else who can help.

2.



**Continue to support them.** As they navigate the difficult situation that they're in, continue to support them as much as you can. This can be as basic as being their cheerleader or it might mean something like covering their shift at work if they need to leave to deal with the situation. Knowing that you still have

their back can make a world of difference.<sup>[14]</sup>



**Find them some supporting materials.** Do a little research on the problem that they're having and send them helpful links. You can even buy them a book, if you find one that covers their problem. This is a great way to give someone the tools they need to solve their own problems.<sup>[15]</sup>



**Follow up on the issue.** If they don't offer any follow up information or updates, you should ask them (unless they clearly don't want to talk about it). This will let them see that you really do care about them and that you really are invested in seeing their problem solved.<sup>[16]</sup>

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