

## How to Respond

If your student verbalizes to you an area in which they are struggling, it can be shocking, and you may not know exactly how to respond. As difficult as it may be for you, as a parent, to hear some of the ways in which your student is struggling, it is likely even more difficult for him/her to share their struggles openly with you. Be present with them and empathetic in your responses. It's not your job to "fix" your student. It's your job to support, love, and guide them toward people and resources that will promote healing and growth. Below are a few helpful tips on how to respond with love and support no matter what struggle your student may be facing.

- **Practice Empathy** (Watch This [Brene Brown Empathy Video](#))
- **Practice Your "Not-Surprised" Face**
  - No matter how shocking the words coming out of your student's mouth may be, remain calm in your demeanor. By responding in an anxious or angry way, you send the message that what you're hearing is "too much", which may lead your student to shut down or feel guilty for causing you stress.
- **Ask open-ended questions versus yes or no questions**
  - By asking a question like, "*How are you feeling today?*" instead of "*Do you feel anxious today?*" you're encouraging your student to verbalize their feelings, which can help you understand even better what they're going through all while encouraging self-awareness skill development in them.

## What To Say & What Not To Say

- **Do say....**
  - **Phrases that affirm, validate, encourage and explore feelings**
    - "*Thank you for sharing with me. I imagine that was hard to say out loud, but I'm so glad you trust me enough to share this with me.*"
    - "*How does this make you feel or how is this impacting you?*"
    - "*I understand why you would feel that way.*"
    - "*How can I best support you right now? Or Can we together think of one helpful next step?*"
- **Don't say....**
  - **Phrases that minimize, belittle, or bring judgment to the individual**
    - "*You must have done something to cause this.*"
    - "*It could be worse.*"
    - "*You'll learn something from this.*"
    - "*What doesn't kill you, makes you stronger*"
    - "*Everything happens for a reason.*"
    - "*This too shall pass.*"
    - **NOTE: While these phrases are not bad in and of themselves, they are not helpful or even slightly encouraging for someone in a fragile or highly emotional state of mind. Sometimes, we default to phrases like these because we don't know what else to say, when in fact, it's better to simply say, "I'm not sure what to say."**