

Extending Support to Others During Divisive Events: A Few Ideas

Transformative events and experiences, such as war and violence, can affect us deeply. Whether it is a brief interaction in a class or student organization meeting or when passing one another in the hallway, you can reach out to support a friend, even if your views or backgrounds differ from theirs. Here are some ideas to show support in brief one-on-one talks:

Start by doing a check-in. Check in with yourself. Consider your goal in having the conversation, and make sure your intent is centered on the other person. Ensure you have the relationship and bandwidth to be supportive.

Reaching out matters, even if they are not interested in talking. The other person may not want to talk now, or at all. Respect their answer if they are not interested. (“I understand. If you want to talk later, let me know.”) Remember, the whole point is to let them know you care, not to debate.

Think before you share, and be your authentic self. Remind yourself that the purpose for reaching out is to show support to them. Be genuine when connecting with others. Let them know you value them as a person. There are no magic words; just be yourself when you reach out.

Acknowledge the situation and be supportive. (“I know there’s lots going on. It’s tough watching the news. How are you holding up?”)

If they are grieving a personal loss, express empathy. (“If you need anything, I’m here for you. Let me know how I can help or if you just want to talk. It sounds like you’re not just carrying the weight of the lives lost but also some anxiety about what’s coming next. I can see how your connection(s) can make things feel more overwhelming.”) Sometimes you can let them know you care by just sitting with them for a while without saying anything. Listening is often the most powerful way to be supportive.

Show that you hear them without judging or entering into an argument. (“I think I hear not only your sadness and concerns about the thousands of innocent lives lost but also apprehension about what happens next.” “So, with your connections to the region, you are feeling this with even more depth and urgency.”) If they try to persuade you to agree with their position, let them know that you’re focused on being a friend. (“There are some important arguments going on, but mostly I’m wondering how you’re doing in the midst of this awfulness.”)

If they express concern about their safety or well-being, offer to help locate and make an appointment with safety resources, counselors, those who will help them report or other professionals on campus. You might ask about their confidence or trust in available resources.

Think about ways to conclude the conversation. Try to end on a supportive note. Allow them to preserve self-esteem and leave them with the sense that you appreciate and value them and want to be supportive in a difficult time. Think about how to end the conversation after checking in, or, regrettably, if the discussion turns argumentative. (“Please let me know if you need anything or want to talk more?” “Thanks for talking. This is a tough time.”)

For a list of resources for emotional support, reporting and safety, visit:

go.osu.edu/mymentalhealth
equity.osu.edu
dps.osu.edu

