

HOW TO SAVE SOMEONE'S EMOTIONAL LIFE

Have you ever saved anyone's life?

My eleven-year old niece did just that. The story is rather remarkable.

Elizabeth Marie was in the front room watching TV; she had let the family's pet, Sampson, a large German shepherd, out the door to go to the bathroom. Suddenly, the dog sprinted away from the house and attacked a five-year old boy, who was just ambling past the house and down the street.

No apparent reason

The child was not doing anything inappropriate, such as throwing rocks at the dog, etc.

The dog knocked the boy face down into the paved street and began chewing on the child's neck and ear. Of course, he was crying and screaming. Who would not be?

Call 911!

Ellie, without conscious thought for her own safety, went running after the dog, calling his name, and demanding that he return to the house. When he did not respond, she jumped on the dog's back, wrestled it away from the child, dragged the dog back to the house, and yelled to her family to call 911.

Because of her immediate response and lack of concern about her own participation, the young boy's life was saved. The hospital doctor was 100% convinced of this fact.

Stitches, doctors, attorneys

Of course, there were complications—134 stitches, medical bills, and a day in court. However, the parents were grateful for Ellie's quick thinking and immediate action. And, fortunately, the plastic surgeon did a fabulous job and the resulting scar were minimal.



What if...

Normally, we apply "what if" scenarios about things that go wrong. In this instance, there are "what ifs" even though the end result went right.

What if Ellie had gone back into the house to watch TV? What if Ellie had decided someone else needed to solve this problem and had gone back into the house to get her father? Would those few extra minutes in either of these situations have spelled disaster?



Superheroes

It seems to me that it requires super-hero abilities to be physically in the right place at the right time to do the right thing to save someone's life. However, many of us often find ourselves in the right place and the right time to save people from emotional trauma and yet we do nothing.

The signs of emotional pain—a hint of hurt in the eyes, trembling lips, withdrawing from the conversation—are obvious to those of us paying attention, but frequently, I think, we ignore the clues.

Learn as I go

So, why do we pass over the signs and the opportunity? Do we underestimate our own abilities? Or, perhaps, our influence?

I know I do. But I've learned through trial, error and lots of practice to have confidence in my ability to step in.

Intervening to save someone's emotional life isn't easy. And it is almost impossible when we don't know what to do. The hard part is speaking up—without offending—about observations. How to deliver a message without insult requires the utmost of tact—and a careful balancing of words and actions, in order to reduce social distance and solidify communication.

But there are steps we can take if we know what to do and how to do it. I would like to share with you how to save someone's emotional life when they are about to lose it.

How to save someone's emotional life

To save someone's emotional life requires three things:

STEP 01

Listen twice as much as you speak.

No further explanation is necessary.

STEP 02

Ask, do not tell.

Do not give them advice. Ask your person questions to elicit the truth beneath their surface beliefs.

What do you truly want? What do you truly need? We all want jobs that pay \$250,000 year. However, in truth, we need jobs that pay the rent, put food in our mouths, clothes on our backs, and some fun in our lives. Or, we think we want Prince Charming as our significant other, when what we really need is someone in whom we can confide; someone we can trust; someone who has our backs; and someone who loves us in spite of our warts.

How do you get the knowledge, skills, and ability to obtain what you need? Does this require more schooling, a stronger network, a new skill? Do you need to become an expert/guru in something you presently are only proficient? Do you need more creativity and less rigidity in your approach?

What are you willing to give up to achieve your goals? Perhaps less sleeping time? Less time traveling? Less social time—at least for a few months? Less time reading those mystery novels you love so much?

Ask them how important the issue is to them, ask them to give it a rating out of ten, ask them how they would evaluate the situation, how they could move forward.

STEP 03

Acceptance of, and approval for, the very thing the individual is worried about and is rejecting in his or her self.

Find some way to show them their view is negatively skewed.

Perhaps the individual is lamenting his/her lack of ability in math; share with them that one of the things you admire/love about them is their ability to spatially arrange items in the fridge/on the wall/in the trunk.

Perhaps he/she deplores their lack of planning/organizing skills; find a way to appreciate his/her forecasting ability, decision-making, or ability to rouse others with his/her words.

Listen to their lament and come at it from a different perspective, if necessary.

You will find these steps have universal application; the situation doesn't need to be serious or emotionally life-threatening for them to be helpful. Any point of confusion or uncertainty can be supported by these three steps.

But when someone's emotional life is threatened, when serious distress and life-altering actions persist, the danger can be dissipated by following the above. Saving someone's life, physical or emotional, is deeply rewarding. Both for the saver and the saved. Quick thinking, emotional compassion, an "other" focused mindset together with the above skills will reap enormous dividends both for you and your loved one.

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