

# Helping the Hurting

Larry W. Bailey, Ph.D.  
Manager, AMH Behavioral Health Services

You are likely to know people who are hurting. They may be experiencing an *aching* heart, *wounded* pride, a *broken* relationship, or some other *painful* event. You may be in a position to provide help to someone that is hurting, even though you don't have a graduate degree in counseling. The support and encouragement of a friend can be very meaningful in times of emotional distress. Your efforts to be of assistance may be enhanced by being aware of some basic principles in helping others who are hurting, and by using a simple framework that is easy to remember.

## Basic Principles

1. The one who is in need of help is the best judge of the nature and extent of the hurt, not the helper. You may view the situation as “no big deal” or one that should be easily managed, but the helpee's perception is the crucial issue.
2. The hurting person is experiencing a time of instability and vulnerability, and these are the elements of change. The person may regress (use immature, ineffective coping mechanisms) or progress (reflect on priorities and choose paths of growth).
3. Before trying to assist someone in sorting out difficult thoughts and feelings, the helper must assure that his/her own emotions and coping mechanisms are intact.

## Framework for Helping: The Five R's

**Relate.** The most important element in a helper/helpee interaction is the *relationship*. The helper must be able to convey CARE for the helpee (Concern, Acceptance, Respect, Empathy).

**Release.** The helpee needs to feel comfortable in expressing difficult feelings and thoughts, many of which are threatening and “bad.” The helper encourages *expression* rather than *repression* that leads to *depression*.

**Recognize.** Following the outpouring of emotions, the helpee is in a better position to think clearly about the problematic issues, consider priorities, and make decisions related to the next steps.

**Redirect.** The person being helped needs to move from affect to action, from improved thinking to construction living. The goal is to develop greater effectiveness in coping skills, communication and social involvement.

**Reflect.** It is useful to review the significant events that have occurred, and to give attention to ways in which the experiences may contribute to personal insight, important relationships and spiritual growth.

As we use the five R’s in helping those who are hurting, we address all major aspects of our personhood: Relational, emotional, cognitive, behavioral and spiritual.