

BBC Learning English

How to ...

react to someone's bad news



bbclearningenglish.com

SIG

William: Hello and welcome to *How to...* the programme from BBC Learning English that gives you the language tools to do a good job, whatever the situation...

TAG

My name's William Kremer. It's often said that a good friend is someone who is there for the good times and for the bad times. But if your friend has some very bad news – what's the best way for you to react? Let's imagine that his or her marriage breaks down... or maybe a relative of dies. What would you say?

Well, this is a very difficult question, and of course the difficulty isn't just connected with language. Even if you're fluent in English, it's often very difficult to know what to say and how to react.

In this programme, I'll be talking to a colleague from BBC Learning English about she reacted to her friend's bad news...

STING

Examples

William: So, I'm joined in the studio now by my colleague, Nuala O'Sullivan. And er, Nuala, you once had to help a friend through a difficult time didn't you?

Nuala: Yes

William: Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Nuala: Well, erm, one Sunday morning, my friend came round to visit me, and you know, we were just having a cup of coffee and then she said ‘My husband’s left me’. Erm, so it was really... it was, it was really shocking. I mean, I think I just must have said ‘Oh my god’ or ‘that’s awful’ or..., some kind of, something like that. But, rather than remembering what I said, I do remember going across the room to where she was and just giving her a huge hug... and I think that’s... you know, I think that’s the thing most people would do in that situation.

MUSIC

William: Nuala said that she was just having coffee with her friend when her friend told her that her husband had left her. How did Nuala react?

Nuala: I mean, I think I just must have said ‘Oh my god’ or ‘that’s awful’ or..., some kind of, something like that.

Examples

Elena: Oh my god.

Matt: Oh my god.

Elena: Oh my god, that’s awful.

Matt: That’s terrible!

William: We don’t say ‘That’s a pity’ or ‘That’s too bad’ when someone has really bad news. That’s awful! That’s terrible! These are good ways to react.

But, words aren’t everything.

Nuala: Rather than remembering what I said, I do remember going across the room to where she was and just giving her a huge hug and I think that's...

William: Nuala gave her friend a huge hug – she embraced her.

TAG

William: You might want to show that your friend that you can imagine the way he or she must be feeling...

Examples

Elena: You must be feeling terrible!

Matt: You must be feeling absolutely awful!

William: Very often, we hear about someone's bad news from someone else. In this situation, it's perhaps better to go to your friend and offer help, than wait for your friend to come to you. But how can you raise such a difficult subject?

Examples

Elena: I heard about your news.

Matt: I heard about your terrible news.

Elena: I'm so sorry to hear about your news.

Matt: I'm so sorry to hear about your awful news.

Elena: Martin told me about what happened.

STING

William: So, Nuala, how did you help your friend in the weeks after her husband left?

Nuala: Erm... the main thing was, that, I think in that situation, is actually just being able to listen... I think when people are going through a hard time, that's, you know, one of the key things that we all do is we're, we're just there to listen. And we say to them, you know 'Any time you want to talk, just come round or just give me a phone call' – you know, because I think when people are sad, that's the one thing that actually really does help – is being able to talk about it.

MUSIC

Examples

Elena: Any time you want to talk just come round

Matt: Any time you need to talk, just call me

Elena: If you ever want to talk about it, just say the word

Matt: If you ever need to talk to someone, you know where I am

MUSIC END

William: Is that how you saw your role then, in the weeks that followed that announcement, that you were sort of, there to listen, or did you offer more practical help in some way?

Nuala: There's, there's definitely a practical element, you know so, you know, you say things like 'If there's anything I can do just let me know' and you really do mean anything... and it could be something simple like going for shopping, or it could be babysitting or, you know, or listening, or any of those things.

Examples

Elena: If there's anything I can do just let me know...

Matt: If there's anything I can do just let me know...

William: OK Nuala, thank you very much.

Nuala: My pleasure.

William: You're a great friend.

And if you would like to find out more about today's words and phrases, and also take a quiz on the topic of reacting to bad news and supporting your friends, then do check out the How To webpage on [bbc learning english dot com](http://bbc.learningenglish.com).

Good bye!

MUSIC – FADE UP AND OUT