

Handling Trauma Disclosures: The CARE Approach

When someone unexpectedly shares a deeply emotional or traumatic experience - sometimes called 'trauma dumping' - it can catch us off guard and leave us feeling overwhelmed or unsure how to respond. While most of us aren't formally trained to handle these situations, having a framework can help us navigate these sensitive moments both confidently and compassionately.

The CARE framework offers a practical approach to support others while maintaining healthy boundaries and protecting your own wellbeing.

This framework stands for: Check-in and Centre before Compassionately Listening, Affirm and Acknowledge Boundaries, Redirect and Encourage Self-Care.

Firstly, start by checking in with yourself and taking a moment to ground yourself and centre. A brief pause for mindful breathing can help you regulate any immediate emotional response. Remember, you don't need to have all the answers - sometimes being present and acknowledging someone's experience and compassionately listening can be incredibly comforting.

You might say something like, *'I'm sorry to hear you're going through this,'* or *'Thank you for sharing that with me, I can see this has been really tough for you.'*

These statements validate their feelings and acknowledge their courage in opening up. It doesn't mean you're taking on their trauma; rather, it lets them know you're present and listening.

Secondly, **affirm and acknowledge boundaries**, in these interactions, you want to affirm the individual's feelings and experiences without probing further. If the disclosure is beginning to go beyond your role, it's helpful to acknowledge the conversation and gently input boundaries.

In this case, you could try a soft but clear boundary statement, like: *'I'm not the best person to help with everything you're going through. Let's see what resources might be more suitable.'* This gives a clear signal that, while you care, there are other ways to address the person's needs.

It's important to remember that boundaries aren't a rejection; they're a way to keep interactions supportive and healthy for both sides.

Next, **Redirect** the conversation. Sometimes, the best support you can offer is to guide someone toward the correct help.

Here are a few ways to navigate this in a caring, approachable way - you could say something like, *'I think it might be really beneficial for you to speak to someone trained in helping with this. There are some great resources and organisations out there that could really help and give you the support you need.'*

Depending on the resources available in your workplace, area or community, you may be able to point them toward an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), the local well-being or counselling services, or other mental health services accessed via the GP or a Trauma-Informed Therapist in Private Practice.

Remember, referring them to someone more qualified isn't letting them down - you're providing direction which shows you care and empowering them to access the deeper support they may need.

Throughout this process, remember to **encourage self-care** - both for the individual and yourself. Taking time to rest and reset after challenging conversations is essential for emotional wellbeing. It's perfectly normal to feel impacted by these interactions, and seeking support for yourself is a sign of strength, not weakness.

By following these steps, we can navigate difficult conversations with empathy, while protecting our own wellbeing and empowering the individual to get the right level of support.

Knowing how to handle trauma disclosures with both compassion and boundaries takes practice, but with time, these skills can become a natural part of your interactions and you can lean upon this framework to support you.

For additional support, you'll find a link below to some calming exercises you can practice when feeling overwhelmed, the breathing exercises will help you create calm and feel grounded. Using these tools regularly as part of your own self-care tool kit can help us stay resilient and ready to face the unique challenges that come with this work.

[\[Link to calming exercises and breathing techniques\]](#)

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