

Giving Advice

As Stephen Ministers we are cautioned against giving advice to our Care Receivers, but what are we to do when our CR press us for an opinion? They may say, "What would you do if you were me?" This can be very difficult because most likely we DO have an opinion on their situation and it may not be easy to keep from expressing it.

It may help to remind ourselves of the possible less-than-desirable consequences of sharing our opinion. First of all, if our CR acts solely on our recommendation and there is a bad outcome to the situation, in their mind we will be to blame. It won't matter how much you prepped them with statements such as, "This is JUST MY opinion, you need to do what you feel is best." The CR will find it difficult to see their responsibility for the situation. They also may find it hard if not impossible to trust their SM after this. Secondly, our CRs have to make decisions based on the "facts of their lives" and no one is more acutely aware of those than the CRs themselves. They may have shared much with us, but there will always be more, more that they either haven't had time to share, haven't wanted to share, or have forgotten to share. We base our opinion on what we hear from them which probably is not the entire story. Another thing to remember, our CRs are usually facing some heavy-duty crises in their lives requiring associated heavy-duty decisions and changes in their lives. To do that, they have to feel convicted in their decisions, they have to believe in them in order to follow through with them and to do so, they have to make them on their own.

So do we just sit idly by, lamenting to our CRs, "This must be so hard for you"???

There are many ways that as Stephen Ministers we can assist, encourage and support our CRs as they face difficult decisions and situations in their lives. Let's gather in groups of two or three to brainstorm and explore some of the ways that perhaps we have used already in our experience with CRs or other people in our lives or methods that we would want to try.