

Have you ever been trusted with a friend's emotions? Are you an understanding and trustworthy person for peers around you? Have you ever been labeled by your friends as the “therapist”? Growing up my friends always thought of me as the “funny friend” that no matter what was going on I could make the situation better by supporting others through laughter. However, I began to realize that being funny was maybe able to help my friends to cope with whatever they had going on in their life at the time but in reality it didn't help me cope. As I grew up I started having episodes of sadness at how I was performing in sports, school, and even in my relationships with my friends.

My friend group all grew up playing baseball together so we spent a lot of time talking, laughing, yelling, and arguing. As we aged I was perceived as the “therapist”, not because I had the degree for the job but because I could relate my experiences and contribute my advice onto their situations and have always been a mental health advocate. When they would come to me in these moments overcome with emotion thinking it's better to hold it in then cry. I related to them saying how I know how it feels to have the weight of the world on your shoulders it seems and no matter how hard you try you feel there is no way out. What I found captivating is that when they would talk to me early on and could sense I wasn't really listening for example not looking them in the face, being on my phone, or just nodding my head. I am beyond grateful for my friends being able to trust me with their thoughts, emotions, and feelings.

I can use this self-awareness to promote the development of therapeutic relationships and communication by putting myself in the other person's shoes and imagining how vulnerable I would feel if I was telling someone the hard times and experiences I had to go through because I have been there. It makes a world of a difference to look at them in the eyes and say something therapeutic and empathetic to their current or past situation. It allows them to trust you and be comfortable with you because you are making them feel safe by not judging them. However, everyone is different and responds differently to certain responses you say that could possibly offend them. Non-verbal responses are just as important as verbal responses. If I was telling someone details of my life that are very vulnerable to me and they are looking directly at me, facing me, and saying responses such as “I'm very sorry”, “I understand why you feel that way”, or “Do you want to talk to me more about it” shows that the other person is actively listening to you.

The reason I have always been a mental health advocate is because I had one friend commit suicide, few other friends and myself included that were battling depression due to various different reasons. A lot of people don't understand that simply listening to someone's story can save a life. By simply listening you're giving that person an outlet to express what is going on and a chance to impact that person's life forever. We all experience hardship in life and struggle through lots of different things, it is never “weak” or “too stupid” to reach out for help. Having therapeutic communication responses might not be able to help everyone that hears them but even if it reaches one person here and there that is priceless. I may not be a “therapist” but I will always be a mental health advocate.