



How to Hold Space

Supporting Someone in Crisis Without Losing Yourself

When Someone You Love Is Breaking Down

Watching someone you love fall apart is one of the hardest things you'll ever do. You want to fix it, solve it, make it stop hurting. But mental breakdowns don't work that way.

You can't save them. You can't cure them. But you can **witness them**. You can hold space for their pain without making it about your discomfort. You can show up in ways that actually help instead of making things worse.

Presence without pressure


Being there without demanding they "get better"

Witnessing without judgment

Letting them be messy, scared, and falling apart

Support without sacrifice

Helping them without destroying yourself

 **Important:** If someone is actively suicidal, threatening self-harm, or experiencing psychosis, this is beyond your capacity. Call **988** (Suicide Prevention Lifeline), text **HOME to 741741** (Crisis Text Line), or call emergency services.

What to Say (And What Not to Say)

When You Notice Something's Wrong

✗ Don't Say: "Are you okay?" (They'll automatically say yes) • "What's wrong with you lately?" • "You seem off."

✓ Do Say: "I've noticed you seem different lately. I'm worried about you. Can we talk?" • "You don't seem like yourself. What's been hard this week?" • "I care about you and I'm noticing you're struggling. I'm here—no judgment."

When They Say "I'm Fine" But They're Not

✗ Don't Say: "No you're not, stop lying." • "Whatever, if you don't want to talk about it..."

✓ Do Say: "I hear you, and I'm still worried. I'm here whenever you're ready to talk." • "Okay. Just know I'm paying attention, and I care about you." • "You don't have to talk about it right now, but I'm not going anywhere."

When They're Overwhelmed

✗ Don't Say: "Just calm down." • "You're overreacting." • "Other people have it worse."

✓ Do Say: "This sounds really overwhelming. What would feel most supportive right now?" • "You don't have to have it all figured out. Let's just focus on today." • "I'm here. You're not alone in this."

How to Help Without Making It Worse

Offer Specific, Low-Pressure Support

- "I'm dropping off groceries tomorrow—text me your list"
- "I'm coming over with coffee at 10am—you don't have to talk, I'll just sit with you"
- "Want to take a walk? No agenda, just movement"
- "I'm making dinner—can I bring you a plate?"
- "I'm free Thursday afternoon if you want company"

The key: Make it easy for them to say yes. Remove all barriers. Don't make them explain, justify, or host you.



Don't Try to Fix

"Have you tried exercising?" • "Everything happens for a reason." • "At least you have..." • "Just snap out of it."



Keep Showing Up

"No need to reply, just wanted you to know I'm thinking of you" • "Still here whenever you're ready" • "Checking in—you don't have to respond"

📌 When someone's breaking down, they don't need solutions—they need to be **seen**. Save the advice unless they explicitly ask for it.

Protecting Yourself While Helping Them

You cannot help someone if you're running on empty. Compassion without boundaries isn't compassion—it's codependency.

01

Know Your Limits

What am I realistically able to offer right now? What would feel like too much? What do I need to stay grounded?

03

Recognize Overextension

You're losing sleep worrying about them. You feel responsible for their emotional state. You're neglecting your own needs.

If you're checking multiple warning signs, it's time to pull back. You can't save someone who's drowning by drowning with them.

02

Practice Boundary Scripts

"I love you and I want to support you, but I'm at my capacity right now. Can we pick this up tomorrow?"



When to Get Professional Help

Immediate Intervention Needed

Call **988** or **911** if:

- They express intent to harm themselves or others
- They have a plan for suicide
- They're giving away possessions or saying goodbye
- They're experiencing psychosis
- They're unable to care for basic needs

Strongly Encourage Help If:

- Struggling for 2+ weeks with no improvement
- Work/school performance significantly impacted
- Withdrawing from all social contact
- Abusing substances to cope
- Frequent panic attacks or extreme anxiety
- Sleep/eating patterns severely disrupted



Crisis Lines

Suicide Prevention: **988**

Crisis Text: **HOME to 741741**

SAMHSA: **1-800-662-4357**



Finding a Therapist

Psychology Today

BetterHelp (online)

Open Path Collective (affordable)



How to Suggest Help

"What you're going through sounds really hard. I think talking to a therapist could give you tools I don't have."

Taking Care of Yourself

Supporting someone through a breakdown is exhausting. It's emotional labor that drains your capacity. If you don't protect your own well-being, you'll burn out—and then you can't help anyone.



Reframe Your Thinking

~~"It's selfish to prioritize myself when they're suffering."~~

→ **"I can't show up for them if I'm empty. Rest is responsible."**

Your Capacity Is Human

~~"I should be able to handle more."~~

→ **"My capacity is human. Limits aren't failure."**

Health Over Depletion

~~"They need me more than I need rest."~~

→ "They need me healthy, not depleted."

Quick Reference: In the Moment

Keep this page handy for moments when you need fast guidance.

Panic Attack

Stay calm. Guide slow breathing: "Breathe in for 4, hold for 4, out for 6." Don't say "calm down." Offer grounding: "Name 5 things you can see."

Dissociating

Gently call their name. Offer grounding: "Feel your feet on the floor. Hold this cold water bottle. What do you hear?" Don't snap or yell.

Anger/Lashing Out

Don't take it personally. Set boundary: "I want to help, but I can't if you're yelling. Let's take a break." Walk away if needed—your safety matters too.

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Uncontrollable Crying

Don't stop them. Sit with them. Offer tissues. Say: "I'm here. You're safe. Let it out." Physical touch only if they want it—ask first.

Mentions Suicide

Take it seriously. Ask directly: "Are you thinking about killing yourself?" If yes: "Do you have a plan?" Stay with them. Call 988 or go to ER together.

Your Emergency Self-Care Kit

When you're overwhelmed supporting them, use these reset strategies to protect your own capacity and well-being.



5-Minute Reset

Step outside, breathe deeply, look at the sky



10-Minute Reset

Walk around the block, no phone



30-Minute Reset

Call someone who supports YOU, not them



Full Reset

Take a day off from supporting them—guilt-free

Red Flags You're Burning Out

- Constant anxiety about their well-being
- Feeling responsible for their happiness
- Neglecting your own relationships/work/health
- Resentment building but guilt preventing boundaries
- Physical symptoms (headaches, insomnia)

If you're checking multiple boxes, you need support too. It's not selfish—it's necessary.

You're Doing Better Than You Think

If you're reading this, you're already doing one of the hardest, most loving things you can do: you're trying to show up for someone who's struggling. That matters more than you know.

- You can't fix them—and that's not your job
- Your presence matters, even when it feels like it's not enough
- Setting boundaries doesn't mean you don't care
- Taking care of yourself makes you a better support
- You don't have to have all the answers

Remember This

Loving someone through a breakdown doesn't mean drowning with them. It means being the lighthouse—**steady, present, but not swept away by their storm.**

The person you're supporting is lucky to have you. Not because you have all the answers, but because you're willing to sit with them in the dark. That kind of love—the kind that shows up without needing to fix—is rare.

Trust that your presence matters. Trust that you're doing enough. And trust that taking care of yourself isn't selfish—it's how you sustain the love you're trying to give.

With compassion for both of you, The Arcane Guides Team

You're not alone in this.

Need More Support?

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