



When a Friend Hurts: How to Help When Your Friend Is Sad

In this milestone, we'll explore how caregivers can help children to show compassion while also understanding that it is always okay to share their concerns with trusted adults.

Children are often naturally empathetic—they care deeply about their friends and want to help when someone they care about is sad, worried, or hurting. However, children often lack the experience and emotional maturity to respond well. They may take on the hurt themselves. They may believe that keeping their friend's hurt a secret is the best way to show loyalty. This can sometimes make it hard for them to talk about their friend's hurt (and their own) even with trusted parents and caregivers.

Supplies:

"*The Rabbit Listened*" by Cori Doerrfeld, construction paper, crayons, scissors, and glue

Set-up the space:

Have all of the supplies ready. Pre-cut strips of construction paper to make a headband for yourself and for your child.

Milestone

Opening prayer:

Dear God, our hearts feel very sad because our friend, (name) is sad (or hurt, or scared). We love this friend so much and want them to feel happy, and safe, and loved. Please help us learn how to be a good friend who can sit, and listen, and be with (name) so that they know they are never alone. Thank you for always being with me, especially when I am feeling sad, or hurt, or scared. Amen.

Scripture:

In the Bible, Jesus promises us he is with us always. No matter what. This is true for our friend, too. Jesus is *always* with us. Sometimes Jesus helps us know he is with us through other people. When we feel sad, or hurt, or scared, knowing someone who loves us is with us can help us remember that Jesus is with us. It may not make the sad, or the hurt, or the angry go away, but it can make it easier for us to get through.

Read "*The Rabbit Listened.*"

After you read it, make some “I wonder” statements. **I wonder how the rabbit felt when it sat with Taylor. I wonder what other animals we could imagine. What do you wonder?**

After you have invited your child to wonder, if they do not mention the rabbit’s ears, say something like: **I wonder why it is the rabbit who listened. God has given everything God made exactly what it needs. Some animals need really good ears. Rabbits have big ears to help them hear well. What other animals have special ears? Elephants have huge ears so they can hear sounds from miles away. God has given us good ears too. Our ears can help us show other people we care about them.**

To help us remember that sometimes listening is the most important thing we can do, we are going to make a special headband. Ask your child to draw 2 ears on the construction paper of their choice. They can be ears that look like human ears, bunny ears, elephant ears; whatever ears they would like. Then have (or help) them cut out the ears and attach them to the construction paper headband.

After you have both made your headbands, consider saying something like this: **Thank you for sharing your worries about (name). Things that make us sad (or hurt or angry) are important to share with grown-ups. And now, because you shared this with me, we can pray for (name) together.**

Invite your child to wear their headband (and you do the same), as you say the following prayer:

Dear God, we thank you for the gift of ears to hear and hearts to care. Help us to be good listeners when our friend is sad (or hurt or scared). Please be with (name) in a special way right now. Help them to know that you are always with us, listening and loving us. Amen.

Notes

**Parents/caregivers of neurodiverse children:* If your child has sensitivities that can make wearing a headband uncomfortable, consider making a smaller one for their favorite stuffy to wear.

**Note about mandated reporting:* If your child shares something with you that makes you suspect abuse or neglect, remember it is NOT your job to evaluate the veracity of the story. But, in most states (including North Carolina), *all* adults are mandated reporters; it is your responsibility to protect children. Reach out to your pastor if you are unsure on how to report concerning information.