

2.11 Respect Others' Autonomy When Offering Advice

When sharing guidance, do it freely, without strings attached.

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When you think you know what's best for another person or what the right course of action is for them, it is natural to wish to offer advice. If you become attached to the idea that others should follow your advice, however, you are setting yourself up for heartache and grievance, which can really harm your relationship with them.

On the other hand, if you can give advice generously and accept that others will do as they see fit, you can rest easy knowing that you have offered guidance, whether or not they choose to act on it. This protects your relationship and also leaves the door open for them to choose whether and when to apply your counsel.

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- Frees you from the stress and struggle of feeling that others are not fulfilling your expectations.
- Allows others the freedom to make up their minds.

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- It's hard to be truly unattached. Even if you don't express expectations, you may hold on to them internally, and others will likely feel this.

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There are times when we become aware that someone is embracing ideas or engaging in activities that we don't believe are best for them. They might invite us to offer advice on and insight into their situation. Or we may catch ourselves thinking that we know the optimal course of action and wishing to offer them advice that we hope will prove helpful.

Before acting on this impulse, it is wise to ask ourselves why we feel compelled to tell others what to do? Are we trying to control their behavior? Are we attached to a specific outcome? If the answer to these last two questions is yes, it may be beneficial to refrain from saying anything. Otherwise, there is a risk that you will put pressure both on yourself and on them, potentially straining your relationship.

It may be helpful to remind yourself that others have the right to live their lives, just as you have the right to live yours. If you feel you must provide advice, it can be helpful to draw on your own personal experience and background, sharing what you have learned, as opposed to simply telling them they are wrong and should behave differently.

Another thing you can try before speaking is to imagine offering your best advice and having it rejected out of hand. If the person you advised did the complete opposite of what you suggested, would that trigger an emotional response in you? If so, taking a moment to consciously acknowledge and feel these emotions can defuse a lot of the potential sting later on.

