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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *Rebound*, by Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, Dominique Smith, and John Hattie.

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## SHOWING SUPPORT TO OTHERS

The challenges our colleagues are facing weigh on each of us, too. However, it can feel awkward to talk with them about their well-being. Many of us hold some rigid notions of professional lives versus personal ones and are reluctant to cross an unstated boundary. Our own experience with teaching and writing about adult social and emotional learning (SEL) is that most educators want to turn the discussion back to their students rather than sit with their own feelings. This is a characteristic of our profession—we keep a steady lens on students. But if we don't expand our focus to include colleagues, we condemn people to wrestle with personal challenges in isolation.

We don't expect you to suddenly become a therapist, or worse yet, to start diagnosing others. But your willingness to open a line of communication with a colleague who you believe is struggling may very well be a light for them. Don't be afraid that you might not say the exact right thing. Your demonstration of caring sends a powerful message to them. Having a few statements or questions in mind can open up the conversation. Remember, it is the power of listening that matters more than talking about the solutions. A fundamental aspect of respect and dignity is the ability to listen and communicate that you have listened. (It is no different for many students who want you to listen to them—listen to how they are solving problems and not have you rush in with the right answer—they know there is a right answer; it is their thinking that is not leading to the right answer that is their concern—and listening to how they are thinking and processing is what they want you to do to then help them work to the right answers).

Elmer (2019) advises that these can be especially helpful in guiding your conversation:

- **Do you want to talk about it? I'm here when you're ready.** This is more direct than simply asking, "Are you okay?" which can tempt the stock reply, "I'm fine."
- **What can I do to help today?** Sometimes doing a simple task together, such as giving a hand at organizing your colleague's class library, can serve as a way to establish a safe space for conversation.
- **How are you managing?** This question allows you to acknowledge a person's struggles without having to list them.
- **You're not alone. I may not understand exactly how you feel, but you're not alone.** This counters the temptation to turn the spotlight on yourself and your own challenges. When you're reaching out to

someone who you suspect needs support, don't try to match their challenges with your own.

- **That sounds like it's really hard. How are you coping?** Your colleague may name something in particular that they are having difficulty working through. Don't tell them what you did in a similar circumstance; just listen.
- **I'm really sorry you're going through this. I'm here for you if you need me.** Keep the line of communication open. It isn't realistic to believe that a single conversation is going to resolve everything for the person. Complex traumas can't be resolved that way. Letting that person know that you are part of their caring network matters.