

CLOSER

A Short Guide for Adults Who Want to Actually Help

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PFWorks, Inc.

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Ronnie Canty | PFWorks, Inc.

Introduction

You care. That much is already true, or you would not be reading this. You have probably donated before, shared a post about a local shelter, or told a friend you wish you could do more for young people going through hard times. None of that is wrong, and none of it is nothing.

But caring from a distance and actually helping are two different things, and most people never learn where the line between them sits. This guide is a short, honest attempt to show you that line, and to give you something real to do once you can see it.

Why This Guide Exists

PFWorks, Inc. exists because too many young people between the ages of 16 and 24 are navigating real crisis with almost no consistent support around them. Not because nobody cares. Because caring, on its own, rarely reaches the actual gap. Somewhere between the awareness post and the young person standing in it, something gets lost.

This guide will not turn you into a case worker, and it should not. What it can do is close some of the distance between the concern you already feel and the kind of presence that actually reaches someone. That distance is smaller than you think, and most of what closes it is simpler than people assume.

Section 1: What Real Weight Actually Looks Like

When people picture a young person in crisis, they often picture a single dramatic moment. The truth is usually quieter and longer. A teenager aging out of foster care with nowhere lined up to live. A young adult working two jobs while finishing high school because rent does not wait for graduation. A twenty year old who left an unsafe home and now sleeps somewhere different every few nights, trying not to let anyone at work find out.

These situations rarely announce themselves. Most young people carrying this kind of weight have learned to look fine, because looking fine is often safer than looking like they need something. That is part of why concern from a distance keeps missing the mark. The person you would want to help usually does not look like someone who needs help.

Real weight is also rarely one problem at a time. Housing instability tends to travel with financial pressure, and financial pressure tends to travel with a school or work schedule that leaves no room to fix either one. Understanding this is not about becoming an expert in crisis. It is about letting go of the idea that a single gesture, kind as it may be, resolves a situation this layered.

Section 2: The Difference Between Concern and Proximity

Concern says, I hope things get better for kids like that. Proximity says, I am willing to actually know one young person's situation well enough to be useful to them specifically. The first one costs almost nothing. The second one costs real time and real attention, and that is exactly why it works.

You do not have to choose between them completely. Concern is often the doorway into proximity, and there is nothing wrong with starting there. The mistake is stopping there and calling it enough. A donation matters. A shared post matters a little less than people think, though it is still not nothing. What actually reaches someone is consistency: the same person showing up, again and again, long after the initial moment of concern has worn off for everyone else.

Proximity also means being willing to sit with discomfort instead of resolving it quickly. A young person's situation may not have a clean fix, and your instinct to solve it fast can sometimes serve your own discomfort more than their actual need. Real proximity tolerates the mess long enough to be useful inside it.

Section 3: What Actually Helps

Consistency helps more than almost anything else on this list. A young person who has been let down by adults before does not need one big gesture. They need to find out, slowly, that you are still there the next week, and the week after that. Trust gets built through repetition, not through intensity.

Listening without immediately trying to fix something helps too. Most young people in hard situations have already heard plenty of advice, some of it well meaning and most of it useless, because it came from someone who had not actually listened first. Ask questions. Let the answers surprise you. Resist the urge to hand over a solution before you understand the actual shape of the problem.

Connecting someone to real, established resources helps more than trying to be their only source of support. You are not meant to replace a caseworker, a counselor, or a crisis line, and trying to be all of those things for one person usually burns you out and leaves them under supported anyway. Knowing where to send someone, and helping them actually get there, is one of the most useful things you can do.

Showing up in small, practical ways helps. A ride somewhere. Help filling out a form nobody explained clearly. Being a reference when nobody else will pick up the phone. These moments rarely look impressive from the

outside, but they are often the difference between a young person following through on something and giving up on it.

Section 4: What Does Not Help as Much as It Feels Like It Does

One time gestures without follow through can feel meaningful to the person giving them and land as empty to the person receiving them. A single donation, a single shared post, a single conversation where you said the right things once, all of these matter less than a smaller commitment kept consistently over time.

Unsolicited advice rarely helps, even when it is accurate. Someone navigating housing instability or family breakdown usually already knows more about their situation than you do. What they are often missing is not information. It is someone steady enough to stick around while they figure out what to do with the information they already have.

Treating support as something to be seen doing can quietly undercut the person you are trying to help. If the gesture exists mainly to be noticed, it usually is not built to last, and a young person who has been let down before can often tell the difference between support that is about them and support that is about the person giving it.

Section 5: How to Actually Point Someone Toward Help

If a young person in your life is in crisis, the most responsible thing you can do is not try to handle it entirely on your own. Real crisis support exists, and using it is not a failure of your care. It is what real care looks like in practice.

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is available by call or text, day or night, for anyone in emotional distress or crisis, not only for situations involving suicide specifically. The Crisis Text Line is reachable by texting HOME to 741741 for anyone who would rather text than talk. Local resources vary by community, and PFWorks maintains referral connections that can help point a young person toward support that fits their specific situation.

Making the connection is often more important than knowing exactly what to say. Offer to sit with someone while they make the call, or help them find the number if they do not know where to look. You do not need to be the expert. You need to be the reason the expert actually gets reached.

Section 6: Where PFWorks Fits

PFWorks exists in the space between concern and proximity, working to close that gap for adults who want to help and for young people who need something steadier than a single gesture. Right now, that work happens through resource referral and honest, direct awareness content, connecting people to real support and telling the truth about what these young people are actually navigating.

That is deliberate, not a placeholder. Structured, hands on programming is part of where this is headed, built in phases as the resource network and the funding to support it both grow. Every donor, volunteer, and ally who chooses proximity over distance today is part of building toward that next phase.

Conclusion: Closing the Distance

You do not need to become someone else to help. You need to close the distance between how much you already care and how consistently you show up. That shift is smaller than it sounds, and it is available to you starting today.

Pick one thing from this guide. Maybe it is committing to one young person's situation instead of one general cause. Maybe it is learning your local referral options before you need them. Maybe it is simply staying present for longer than the first conversation. Whatever it is, do it on purpose, and do it again next week.

If this guide helped you see the gap more clearly, PFWorks has more ways to get involved as this work grows. Stay close. Stay consistent. That is what actually helps.