

# Communication Tip No. 10: You Can't Fix Them, But You Can ...

**By Caitlin Bootsma**

*Consultant to the VIRTUS® Programs*

Whether it's a toddler being mean-spirited to a sibling, a teenager being self-involved and refusing to see the bigger picture or a coworker holding onto bitterness and resentment, it can be tempting to try to fix them. After all, if you have knowledge or expertise to share, why not impart your wisdom?

The problem is this: the attitude of trying to fix someone is often counter-productive. Rather, as one columnist in Psychology Today [says](#), we should seek to serve the person facing a struggle or challenge. When serving, you are collaborating with the person rather than imposing a solution upon them.

Despite my best intentions, I find it is all too easy to fall into the "fix it" mentality. So, when I'm tempted to fix the behavior of a youth, I'll try to remember instead to:



1. **Listen:** We shouldn't assume we know the root of an issue someone is facing. By lending a listening ear, we demonstrate that we care first and foremost not about the behavior, but about the person.
2. **Ask Questions:** Collaborating with someone (even your own child or student) includes asking them what road they think is best to take.
3. **Encourage:** Rather than just attempting to eliminate the negative action focus on the positive. When the toddler stops bothering his sibling, he'll have a buddy who is more fun to play with. Likewise, when a teenager looks beyond herself, she'll find the world is full of possibilities.
4. **Empathize:** People are a lot more likely to communicate when they are understood. Whether it's affirming their feelings or relating your own similar experience, letting the person know they are not alone in their struggles is important.
5. **Pray:** Ultimately it is God who gives people the grace to flourish in life. As you face challenges or conflicts with people in your life, don't forget to include them in your daily prayers.