

THE BRIEF ENCOUNTER

How to approach someone in need on the street.



Engaging with someone experiencing homelessness requires empathy, preparedness, and a thoughtful approach. This guide presents how to have respectful and helpful interactions using the T.A.K.E. and W.A.R.M. approaches.

Before the Encounter, T.A.K.E.



Tangible Aid

Consider what physical items you can offer, like water, snacks, or seasonal necessities such as a hat in winter or bug spray in summer.



Awareness

Gather information about local resources, such as outreach or crisis numbers, that you can share.
MontCo Mobile Crisis: 855-634-HOPE



Knowledge

Know the locations of nearby services, such as food pantries or places offering free meals, to guide the individual towards them.



Engagement Preparation

Mentally prepare for a respectful and open-minded interaction.

The Encounter, W.A.R.M.



Warm Approach

Begin by observing the situation, and then gently approach the individual with sincerity.



Acknowledgement

Start with a friendly greeting and offer something tangible, such as saying, "I saw you here, and it's hot today, would you like some water?"



Rapport Building

Introduce yourself to establish a personal connection. Saying, "My name is..." can create a more friendly atmosphere.



Meaningful Exchange

Engage in a brief conversation to understand their situation. Ask questions like, "Are you sleeping outside?" or "Do you have places to go?"

If appropriate, offer any additional items and information you have prepared or provide local resources, such as street outreach programs.

Facing Your Fears

Safety

- Observe before you approach
- Start with public encounters (e.g. outside a fast-food place, picnic table in a park)

Negative Response

- Apologize and move away
- Decide if you want to leave something
- Don't take it personally or let it discourage you from helping

Boundary Setting

- If they ask for something you can't do, simply say, "I'm sorry, I can't." (Don't be defensive, and repeat this statement, if needed)
- Offer or re-offer what you have
- Leave if they're having difficulty accepting that

Ending the Encounter

Thank them sincerely for their time and the conversation. Offer positive wishes as you part ways, such as, "I hope things improve for you."

If you plan to return to the area, ask if there's something specific you could bring back next time to support them.