Access Services
strengthening communities

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 that you can share. For individuals in Montgomery County call **MontCo Community Connections:** 610-278-3522

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." Being seen and heard as a neighbor is so important.

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

Want to share this with a friend?
Scan the QR code to get the PDF