

Two Hands Are Better than One

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Last March, I visited Suzu City badly hit by the Noto Peninsula Earthquake as a volunteer. The damage was much more severe than I thought. Most of the houses were destroyed and all utilities were cut off. I moved broken furniture out of damaged houses. When the victims thanked us, I felt happy about being able to help them. Before I went there, I was anxious about what I could do. But they were grateful for any help, so I thought indifference and our hesitation made them feel alone. The same feeling comes from an experience I had in elementary school.

At the entrance ceremony, I made a new friend with autism. I noticed he wanted to make new friends, but didn't know how. So, he was confused, and lost his temper and hit me. I didn't want to leave him alone, so I tried to help him. At first, I told him what he should do, but this was in vain. So, I respected his opinions and spent a long time talking with him. I found his anxiety panicked him. When he looked worried, I said, "It's OK. We are always here to help you." My classmates also tried to help him. For six years, he successfully made many friends, which improved the relationships in our grade.

This experience taught me how important it is to stay beside people in need. According to psychology, my communication style was based on empathy. For instance, he said, "I am in pain." Instead of saying, "I understand how you feel," I said, "You are in pain now" to confirm his feelings. I tried not to talk in a one-sided way, but told him I was always on his side and we exchanged how we thought about each other on the basis that we were both unique and equal. We built a relationship based on trust.

Helping others with empathy makes our society better. Empathy allows you to put yourself in others' place. If you felt their pain, you would want to be helped. As my friend and I overcame our differences, having empathy with various people like those with disabilities can lead us to accept diversity in our inclusive society. It also helps deepen our ties and improves our well-being. The government uses empathy through business like Hometown Tax Donations and crowd funding to improve communities. Tohoku university research shows empathy leads to mutual assistance in our daily lives as well as at times of disaster.

However, according to the World Giving Index by Charities Aid Foundation in England in 2023, Japan ranked the lowest among 146 countries in helping a stranger in public places, because we are too indifferent to notice the people around us. In this world, there are many suffering from those in trouble on the streets to those suffering from disasters and wars. They need our help. You need to have enough empathy to see the people in need. You must remember those in need of your help are next to you, and those who can help you are also next to you. I hope that by helping each other, our world will be a better place to live.

My dream is to be a nurse in the Japan Self-Defense Forces to help people with disaster relief, and I'd like to go back to Suzu City. UNICEF ambassador Audrey Hepburn once said, "You have two hands; one for helping yourself, the other for helping others." I know you have helping hands. How will you use your hands?