

Skillful & Compassionate Communication*

- Compassionate Communication is a powerful healing agent that requires both skill and art

As a Skill:

- Can be learned, practiced and perfected
- May seem hollow without soul

As an Art:

- This is the helper's ability to bring their genuine self or soul into the communication
- Need to draw upon a deeper well of your own encounter of the human spirit
- Need to express intentional caring concern for the bereaved

Learning about compassionate communication includes: how to support a grieving person, the Art of “being with”, listening, and “what to say and what not to say”. **

In order to support a person grieving you need to:

- ***Breathe*** in and breathe out...
- ***Grounding*** yourself first – acknowledge impact the death has on self, have to be present to own emotions first
- ***Open your heart*** and your mind
- ***Be present***, avoid the urge to make it better
- ***Respect*** disorder and confusion...
- ***Do not impose logic*** or order

“Companioning (being with) is about going to the wilderness of the soul with another human being; it is not about thinking you are responsible for finding the way out” Alan Wolfelt

Being With by being...

Respectful - refer to the person who has died by name.

Considerate - allow people to grieve in their own way.

Tolerant - discover the gift of silence...you do not need to fill every painful moment with conversation

Accepting...allow the bereaved to express unhappiness

Aware...of resources the bereaved can utilize if they need more assistance.

Open... to the expression of a wide range of normal grief responses.

There...by taking time to listen with your heart

Sensitive... by encouraging the bereaved to share their thoughts and feelings when they can.

Compassionate... by being supportive, non directive, and non judgmental.

Understanding...that the death of a loved one can be a most painful and distressing period of time.

The Art of Listening...

Don't interrupt. Keep you comments brief and simple.

Ask questions which reveal interest..."What happened?"What was that like?"

Give verbal and non-verbal messages of caresupport body posture/facial expressions

Let people know it's OK to cry....pass the kleenex - It's OK if you get a bit teary yourself.

Don't be distressed by differences in grief responses...emotions are rarely simple

Don't offer unsolicited advice. People will usually ask advice later

Avoid "Buck Up" messages ..."Keep your chin up" ..."Time will heal".

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The most important thing to do, is simply, be present, listen and show that you care

What to say...

- I'm sorry...
- I have not had the experience of losing a spouse/parent...
- This must be a difficult time for you...
- How stressful (or what a shock, or how sad) for you and your family...
- I cannot imagine what you are going through...

...then be quiet.

What NOT to say...

- I understand...
- I know how you feel...
- It was likely for the best...
- It is God's will or it was his (or her) time to go...
- You should be getting over it by now...
- I had another client with the same illness/situation...
- When my father died I ...
- Be strong for the family...

"Any questions you ask another, You must ask of yourself" (Dr. David Kuhl)

- ***What are my beliefs about death & dying*** and how these beliefs impact my work or volunteering?
- ***What creates despair and suffering for me*** as I walk alongside others?
- ***What sustains me*** in this work and brings me encouragement or hope?
- ***At the end of the day***, what do I take home with me? How do I care for myself?

The Principles of Self Care

- ***Maintain your boundaries*** – know your limitations, gives you more choice, know what you can do or can't do
- ***Move from reaction to reflection*** – mindfulness - what do you have control over – become aware of your reactions- what can you differently
- ***Listen to our body, your intuition, your experience-*** pay attention to the warning signals
- ***Find what restores you- rejuvenates you-*** can be very personal as to what works for you. It is about replenishing/"fill the tank"
- ***Give yourself permission to care for self*** – not about being "self centered" but being "centered in self care"

Self-Care for the Volunteer or Professional

- ***After dealing with a difficult situation*** or traumatic story allow yourself some time to sit quietly or rest.
- ***Debrief if necessary...*** call a colleague, your manager, or a friend or counsellor for support
- ***Do whatever is meaningful*** and helpful to you
- ***Be kind and gentle with yourself.*** You have helped an individual or family in a very significant way.