

Compassionate Witness

Written by Gayle Nobel
Friday, 22 June 2012 12:43 -

Somebody close to me is going through a difficult time right now. Sometimes I am at a loss for how to be there for this person, feeling I am not "enough" in some way. I do not always have the perfect thing to say to ease the pain or just the right wisdom to really be helpful in some way. So I've been listening a lot and trying to be supportive and helpful and loving in whatever way comes to me in each moment. Is this good enough? Sound familiar?

This morning I was thinking about how I wish there were some magic guidelines I could follow to be the best possible loving, supportive person. Seriously, I was thinking of it in that way. The answers magically appeared when I checked my email a few minutes ago.

This is an excerpt from a guest post within a blog I sometimes read.

"Throughout our lives, we will be given opportunities to witness with compassion moments of suffering, pain, and mortality. If we open ourselves to this experience we offer ourselves and others a powerful gift."

How to Be a Compassionate Witness

~~Don't worry that you don't know what to say. Be honest. "I'm here with you, I'm not sure what to say or do, but I'm here." These are powerful, freeing words, they convey your willingness to be present in the face of pain and suffering.

~~Try not to focus on fixing it. There are many times in our lives when pain can't be "fixed". Sometimes, this can send us into a tailspin. We may become so anxious about our inability to make it better that we lose our focus on being present. Sometimes we want to run. In those times, the greatest gift we can give is our willingness to stay present even when the sight of another in pain makes us want to flee.

~~Reflect what you see. This may take a little practice. Tuning into others' facial expressions and body language allows us to understand what they're feeling even when they cannot or will

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not express it with words. A simple, "You seem really sad today," can let someone know you're emotionally available.

~~Learn to sit with the feelings that come up in you. When you are with someone who's hurting, what do you feel? Are you uncomfortable? Do you become frustrated when you cannot take away the person's sadness, hurt or anger? Acknowledge these feelings and let them go.

~~Focus on understanding. Ask how they're doing, what they're feeling, what they need right now. These questions communicate that you're truly present and not afraid to hear the answers.

Being a compassionate witness requires us to make a decision. We must decide to show up and stay present with the people in our lives who can use our support, our understanding and most of all, our love.

You can read more from Tara at [Oak Cliff Counseling](#) ."