

When: BE-ing with Those Who Are Suffering

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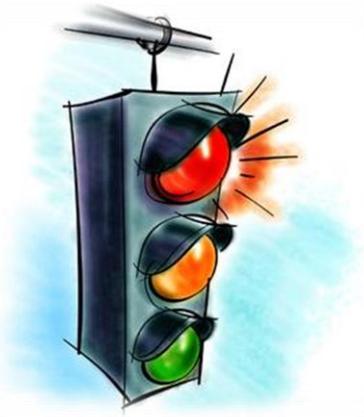
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Objectives & Overview

Improve ability to witness pain
Increase understanding of autonomy
Consider appropriate response skills



The challenge of witnessing pain
The gift of boundaries
"Do's" and "Don'ts"

Challenge of Witnessing Pain

Reminds us of our own vulnerability

Reminds us of our own pain

Our discomfort leads us to
abandon or brush over pain



Greatest barrier to being w/suffering?

- Fear not knowing what to say
- Fear saying the wrong thing
- Feel the need to fix it
- Uncomfortable with pain and tears
- Uncomfortable with silence
- Other _____?

Gifts of Autonomy & Boundaries

Trusting another to find their way

They are the expert



“Being a Midwife” by Lao Tzu

The wise leader does not intervene unnecessarily. The leader's presence is felt, but often the group runs itself. Lesser leaders do a lot, say a lot, have followers and form cults. Even worse ones use fear to energize the group and force to overcome resistance. Only the most dreadful leaders have bad reputations.

Remember that you are facilitating
another person's process.

It is not your process.

Do not intrude. Do not control.

Do not force your own needs and
insights into the foreground.

*If you do not trust a person's process,
that person will not trust you.*

Imagine that you are a midwife. You are assisting at someone else's birth. Do good without show or fuss. Facilitate what *is happening* rather than what *you think* ought to be happening. If you must take the lead, lead so that the Mother is helped yet still free and in charge. When the baby is born, the mother will rightly say: "We did it ourselves".

p.33 from Heider, J. (1985) The Tao of Leadership: Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching Adapted for a New Age.
Atlanta, GA: Humanics Limited.

Gifts of Autonomy & Boundaries

Caregiver as “midwife”

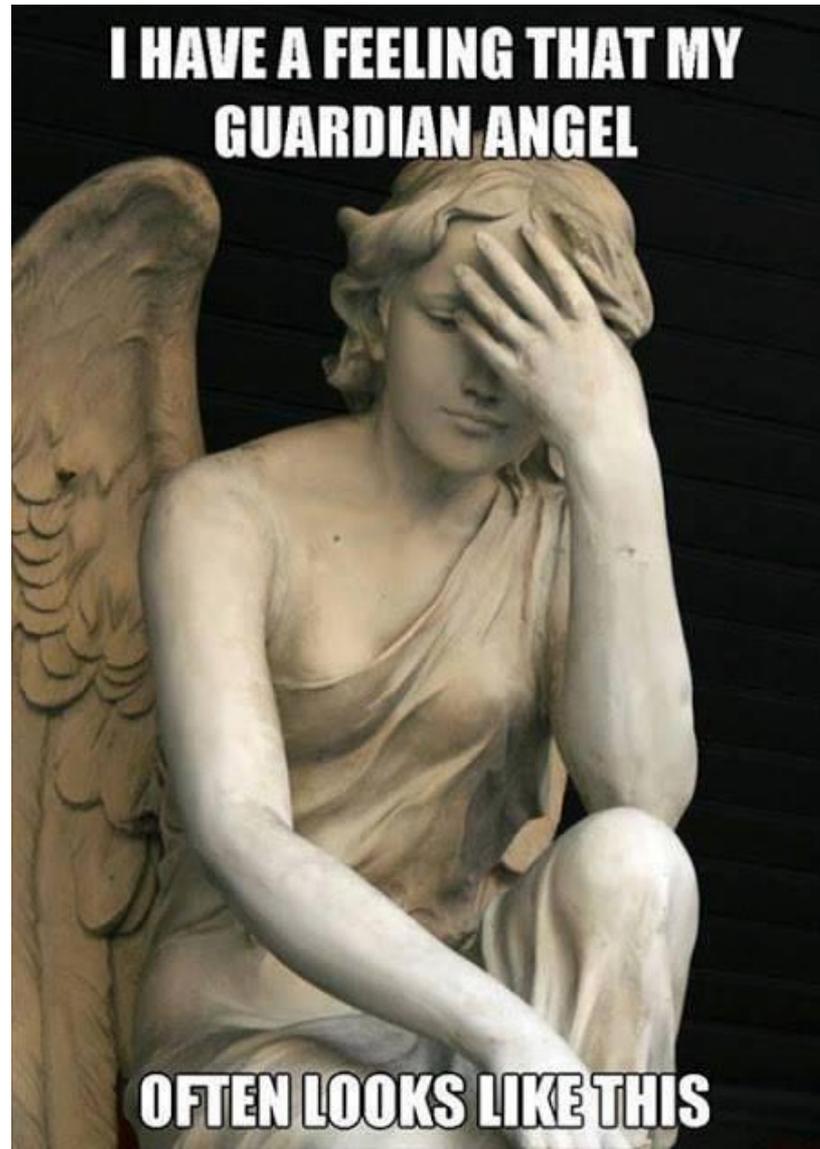
It’s their process

Facilitate what is happening...

The gifts of pain

“If you’re hurting, and I don’t say I’m sorry...”

Do's and Don'ts



Provide Presence



Sit with Silence



“I remember vividly hearing someone say, ‘I don't know what to say’ so they said nothing. They said it with such regret in their voice that I reframed their comment to, ‘I have no words to tell you how sorry I am.’ This seemed to help, especially when the awkwardness of ‘having the correct thing to say’ could potentially translate to...avoidance/a lack of concern.”

How comfortable are you w/ silence?

- 5 "very comfortable"
- 4 "somewhat comfortable"
- 3 "neutral"
- 2 "not very"
- 1 "not at all"
- 0 "Don't know, I've never tried it!"



Follow Their Lead



Normalize vs. Minimize



“Never start a sentence with:

‘Well at least...’

because no matter what follows
you are minimizing
the griever’s feelings.”

Avoid “Reason”...

Understand logic and the pre-frontal cortex

Acknowledge and validate

Offer concrete support

Make plenty of space...

Avoid Clichés

**I avoid clichés
like the plague.**

Time heals all wounds.

You just have to be strong.

Just focus on the positive.

Others...

“The trouble with prefabricated words is that they don’t require or encourage much thinking. Yes, clichés contain truth; that’s why they are used so much. But familiarity can turn even truthful words into vain repetitions.”

Karen Swallow Prior, From Christianity Today, July 2011

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2011/july/doing-authentic-ministry-with-my-smokin-hot-bride.html?start=1>

Avoid Giving Advice



You're young. This will fade.

You can *(marry, have a baby)* again.

Your loved one wouldn't want you to be sad.

It's been a year. Aren't you over it, yet?

Don't cry (the "Tissue Effect").

It was for the best.

You must forget this and move on with life.

To children - You're the man of the house now.

To children - Be strong for your mom.

“I know a web site to help you meet someone”.

W.A.I.T.

Did They Ask?

If you're going to have
opinions about my life, then
I assume you'll be
paying some of my
bills.



somee cards
user card

Avoid Theologizing



**HUGE INSPIRATIONAL QUOTE
ON A LANDSCAPE**

-Famous smart person

God, I'm so deep

All things work together for good.

Everything happens for a reason.

She's in a better place.

Trust God's plan/will.

I / God understand(s).



You should count your blessings.

It was just her time.

We're never given more than we can handle.

God needed another angel.

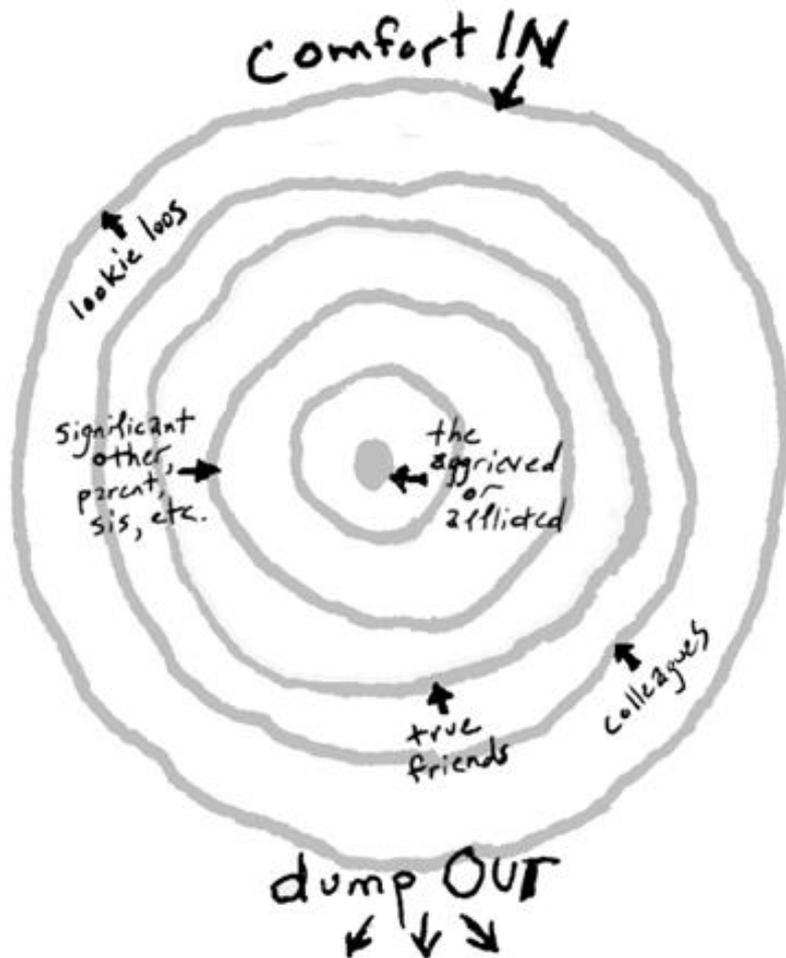
“As a person of faith, I have seen far too many grievors hurt by well meaning individuals trying to be helpful.

One thing I would add to your general conversation – How not to say anything.

The power of consistent presence can say so much more than any phrase.

To sit with another in their pain, and not try to fix it is a hard, but a real offering to the griever.”

Avoid Self-Disclosure



"Ring Theory"

Susan Silk & Barry Goldman
"How not to say the wrong thing"
LA Times April 7, 2013

<http://touch.latimes.com/#section/-1/article/p2p-75241622/>

What TO say...?

I can only imagine how hard this is.

Would you like to talk about it?

**Sometimes things seem so unfair.

(caution!)

I've been thinking about you.

What TO say...?

I hear you.

Would you like to tell me about him/her?

I wish I had answers. I'm sorry I don't.

Can I please __ (*mow the yard, do the
laundry, pick up the kids)__ for you?

***ALWAYS ASK FIRST...**

What TO say...?

I am so sorry. (Why not, "...for your loss"?)

You're not alone. We're with you, as much as you would like.

I love/care about you.

“As much as it might be helpful for some professionals to have a few key ‘phrases’ in their back pocket, I would tend to look more closely at what drives us - in this profession – to want to try and ‘fix things’ or ‘make things better.’ I would look at what makes US uncomfortable personally.

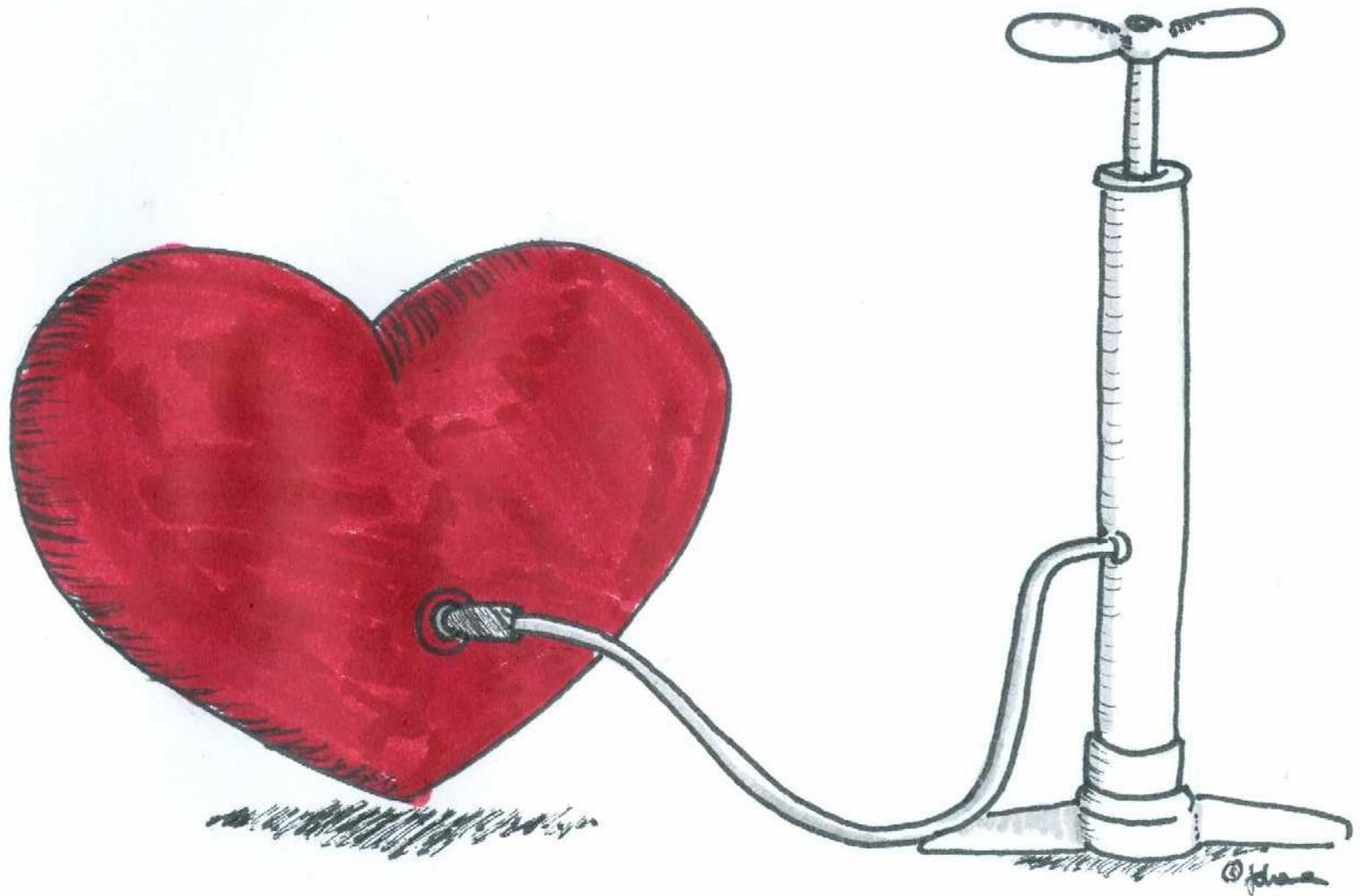
For example, if someone is sobbing uncontrollably, are we tempted to try and ‘fix that’ because we’re personally uncomfortable with deep grief?

Do we hand them a tissue and say 'it's going to be OK' even when we know, in our hearts, that at this moment that's not at all a certain thing?

Sitting with someone's pain, without trying to intellectualize it with pat phrases, is an art....and a big part of that art is knowing yourself well enough to recognize when you're actually trying to 'get something' from the person you're working with (praise, thank you's, a pat on the back).

I believe people know when we're being genuinely present with them, and when we're trying to get them to make us feel better about our role as a professional."

Karl Knox, Director of Bereavement
Gulfside Hospice & Pasco Palliative Care



Perhaps the most important thing we bring to another person is the silence in us. Not the sort of silence that is filled with unspoken criticism or hard withdrawal. The sort of silence that is a place of refuge, of rest, of acceptance of someone as they are. We are all hungry for this other silence. It is hard to find. In its presence we can remember something beyond the moment, a strength on which to build a life. Silence is a place of great power and healing. Silence is God's lap.

Many things grow the silence in us, among them simply growing older. We may then become more a refuge than a rescuer, a witness to the process of life and the wisdom of acceptance.

A highly skilled AIDS doctor once told me that she keeps a picture of her grandmother in her home and sits before it for a few minutes every day before she leaves for work. Her grandmother was an Italian-born woman who held her family close. Her wisdom was of the earth.

Once when Louisa was very small, her kitten was killed in an accident. It was her first experience of death and she had been devastated. Her parents had encouraged her not to be sad, telling her that the kitten was in heaven now with God.

Despite these assurances, she had not been comforted. She had prayed to God, asking Him to give her kitten back. But God did not respond.

In her anguish she had turned to her grandmother and asked, "Why?" Her grandmother had not told her that her kitten was

in heaven as so many of the other adults had.

Instead, she had simply held her and reminded her of the time when her grandfather had died. She, too, had prayed to God, but God had not brought Grandpa back. She did not know why. Louisa had turned into the soft warmth of her grandmother's shoulder then and sobbed. When finally she was able to look up, she saw that her grandmother was crying, too.

Although her grandmother could not answer her question, a great loneliness had gone and she felt able to go on.

All the assurances that Peaches was in heaven had not given her this strength or peace.

"My grandmother was a lap, Rachel," she told me, "a place of refuge. I know a great deal about AIDS, but what I really want to be for my patients is a lap. A place from which they can face what they have to face and not be alone."

Taking refuge does not mean hiding from life. It means finding a place of strength, the capacity to live the life we have been given with greater courage and sometimes even with gratitude. (*A Place of Refuge* by Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen)

Conclusion

Improve ability to witness pain

Be able to sit with our own

Increase understanding of autonomy

We don't have to/get to have the answers

Consider appropriate response skills

When in doubt, just be...