



Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress

Health and Sciences the **Helping People After a Loss**

Throughout our lifetime, many experience loss or trauma, who have know someone that does. distinguish personal experiences, and builders. fear can leave drop everything and or hesitant moment of crisis. Builders those there for years and years, who have experienced a loss. The personal experiences of those who have experienced loss offer valuable insights. Below are some suggestions for how to practice “The Art of Presence” when someone you know has been impacted by loss or a traumatic event.

Do Be There. Sometimes we assume that people need space or time to “sort things out” after a loss or trauma. It can also feel scary to approach people who are hurting and we may feel busy with our own lives. Reaching out and showing up, through phone calls, letters, and personal visits demonstrates care and concern; something that is often deeply appreciated by those experiencing grief.

Don’t Compare. Avoid say things like “I understand what it’s like to lose a child. My dog died, and that was hard too.” Comparisons take the focus off the individual that is hurting and put it onto you. They are often perceived as careless or false and those coping with loss will rarely experience comparisons as helpful.

Do Bring Soup. Non-verbal expressions of care can be very healing. Bringing food or other essentials, particularly if you observe a specific need the person may have, can be helpful and perceived as caring.

Don’t Say “You’ll Get Over It.” Most people that have experienced trauma or loss indicate there is no such thing as ‘getting over it’. For those impacted, a major disruption often creates a new concept of what is normal in their lives with no real going ‘back to the old me’.

This fact sheet contains suggestions for how to practice “The Art of Presence” when someone you know has been impacted by loss or a traumatic event.

Do Be a Builder. People of us will dealt with loss might or at least between firefighters Our own Firefighters will uncertainty, and arrive at the us feeling unprepared are to respond or interact with walking alongside as those effected live out their lives in the world.

People who are trying to assist may

feel drawn to one of those two roles; offering both can be very helpful.

Don’t Try to Make Sense of What Happened. Comments like “It’s all for the best”, “There must be a reason this happened” or other explanations, can be experienced as hurtful. Our achievement-oriented culture is often focused on solving problems or repairing brokenness. Sitting quietly with someone who is suffering through pain and uncomfortable feelings grants them the dignity of their own process and affords them the respect of ultimately determine the meaning.

In addition to the suggestions above, the basic principles of Psychological First Aid can provide additional help in guiding our interactions. These principles create and sustain an environment of (1) safety, (2) calming, (3) connectedness to others, (4) self-empowerment, and (5) hopefulness. When our words and actions foster these things, it helps those dealing with loss or trauma to feel supported and assists them in dealing with a difficult situation.

Adapted from an article by Dravid Brooks in the New York Times on January, 20th 2014.

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SWA/TWU556

2019