

Grief & Wellness Services

Grief Resolution, Understanding and Acceptance

What Do I Say?

The Solution to Foot in Mouth

I recently wrote about the meaningless clichés that many people use when klutzing their way through conversations that involve the pain of others. Observations of how we are hurt by this process serve little purpose unless we can offer some alternate ways to successfully communicate with those enduring their pain.

It is my belief that the root of this problem lies with some very basic key misinformation that we seem to inherit from our family upbringing and societal influences and I suggest that these beliefs are not only taught but somehow generationally epigenetically transferred.

Let us examine what it is that we want to do when one of our friends' experiences the death of a loved one, loses their job, suffers a broken relationship or has been subject to some of life's unfairness? I want you to honestly review what it is that you feel at such a time and exactly how you would like to be able to "handle" this situation???"

Perhaps, as you may love, care, are extremely fond or just like this person you want to utter some words that are expressively soothing, you find yourself devoid of an utterance that fits; please do not issue a cliché. I fully understand that we all suffer the pain of words spoken with loving intent that get jumbled somehow with their deliverance and yet we feel entrapped by this almost obligatory process.

My urgent and primary urge to you is to listen with your **heart** and not your head. Your head contains a "fixit gene" and it is the home to that illogic that is always self contradictory (do what I say etc). Too often our desire to want to relieve someone else's pain reflects our own discomfiture and "it will be better for all if this subject is changed quickly". I suggest that we adopt the golden rule approach and relate everything we say or ask as to how we would like to be treated if it was us in that position.

Grief & Wellness Services

Grief Resolution, Understanding and Acceptance

So please ask your self these questions.

1. Do I really understand what it is that has happened?
2. Have I any personal experience with this event?
3. Have I any comprehension as to how that person must be feeling?
4. Have I listened to what has been said?
5. Am I apprehensive about making contact?
6. Have I thought about what to say?
7. Do I already have a set of words that I use under these circumstances?
8. Do I really believe that professional distancing has any value to the person or myself in pain?

When we listen with our **hearts** we do **not** need to do the following;

1. Attempt to take away someone's pain
2. Remain aloof and distant with no physical touch
3. Try to fix them
4. Try to protect them from the reality of life
5. Change our language, attitude or adopt an affected voice tone
6. Shift the focus of attention when uncomfortable
7. Make statements that abstract their grief by comparing it to others or our self
8. Physically avoid people.

Grief & Wellness Services

Grief Resolution, Understanding and Acceptance

OK, then what do we say and do?

1. Give them a big hug
2. Acknowledge that you do not have any magic words or sponges of comfort.
3. Tell them that you love them
4. Tell them that you are sorry or equivalent words and understand that the word "sorry" becomes wearisome and has intimations that the bereaved person has reason to be "pitied" They often don't want you to be sorry for them but rather just "there" and love them.
5. It is so easy and natural to ask the question; "How are you?" If it slips out simply acknowledge it and reassure them they you know it is a "dumb" question as they must be feeling terrible. When we ask that question it also invites the person to really tell you but they also know you do not want to hear it all.
6. Can I suggest that use the following if you wish; "Would you like to tell me how you are feeling?" Please then listen, listen and keep listening. There is no need for advice!
7. Always ask questions about them
8. Ask questions that extend the conversation
9. Ask questions that prove that you have listened and have started to "get it"
10. Tell them that you care
11. Admit to them that you feel inadequate as you have no idea of their pain but it must terrible.
12. Always mention the person or event that has occurred as it validates their experience
13. You do not always have to talk

Grief & Wellness Services

Grief Resolution, Understanding and Acceptance

Adopt this approach and be gentle with yourself if it does not go as well as it did when you practiced it in the shower. Just be honest with them as the bereaved and suffering have enormous powers of understanding and support and their antennae can pick up sincerity as well as its opposite.

When you come from the head it will be analytical, academic and remote. When you come from the heart it will always be love based. Questions are formed with care and honesty and isn't that how we would like to be understood when it comes our turn as it surely will?

Listen With Your Heart & Not Your Head