

Being a Healing Presence

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“I just do not know what to do.” “If I go over there what do I say to make it better?” “It just feels so awkward because our lives are nothing alike now.”

When a friend or family member is a caregiver, these are common feelings and thoughts that others in their life may have. The feeling of not knowing what to do or say can be debilitating. The fear of saying the wrong thing can keep people away and sadness and anticipatory grief (<https://crossroadsu.org/caring-for-the-caregiver/emotional/anticipatory-grief/>) can be too much for some to handle.

What is a Healing Presence?

In James E. Miller’s book, *The Art of Being a Healing Presence*, he discusses this very dilemma. He states, “Healing presence is the condition of being consciously and compassionately in the present moment with another or with others, believing in and affirming their potential for wholeness, wherever they are in life.”

The new year can be a time when we think more deeply about connecting to others and take time out of our busy days to relate to one another. It can also be a time when our own grief and sadness (<https://crhcf.org/Blog/dr-ken-doka-on-grief/>) can stand in the way of being present for another. Thinking about the losses we have experienced keeps us from visiting others that are currently in their caregiving years. We think we have to *do* something. *Fix* something. *Change* something.

As you see from Miller’s definition of being a healing presence there is actually not much to do, fix or change. Very little action is needed at all. This can be the hardest part. Sitting with a friend or loved one and simply being present is hard. The feeling of needing to say the right thing (<https://crhcf.org/Blog/The-Directors-Desk/the-meaning-of-love-keeping-it-simple/>) can keep us from actually listening and compassionately being a healing presence.

How to be a Healing Presence

So, how do I do this? How can I be a healing presence during the long winter months?

1. Show up

Call, text, email, and/or visit friends and loved ones who are caregivers or are grieving.

Acknowledge their pain, suffering and sadness and listen to their stories

(<https://crhcf.org/Blog/a-piece-of-my-own-story/>).

2. Speak their loved one's name and share fond memories

This is especially needed if their loved one has already passed away. Hearing their name and that you remember that they were here and that their life was important can be so healing to a grieving person (<https://crhcf.org/Blog/Letters-to-the-Bereaved/understanding-the-anger-caused-by-grief/>).

3. Do not try to fix what has happened

As much as we want to none of us can make someone's husband not have Alzheimer's, their daughter not have been involved in a tragic car wreck or keep their beautiful baby from dying so young. But, we can help in tangible ways by doing laundry, cleaning their home, bringing gift cards for restaurants or offering to sit with their loved one for a while so they can get out of the home. Thinking beyond endless casseroles and truly finding what your friend or loved one needs in the moment is a healing way to connect to each other.

There are many ways that we can get involved and help ease some suffering. I learned this lesson in my own life.

My sister lost a child a few years ago. The time we spent with my nephew was beautiful and sweet but the first few months after his death were some of the darkest days in our family. One day I was going to my sister's and I had meals in hand for her and her family. My four-year-old asked where I was going and I told him to his aunt's house because she is sad and Mommy needs to help her. He looked up at me very puzzled and said, "Mommy, she does not need you or that food. She needs her baby but he is gone. That is why she is sad." In that moment I learned more from my

four-year-old about being a healing presence than I had in all my years as a hospice social worker (<https://crossroadsu.org/caring-for-the-caregiver/physical/understanding-your-loved-ones-hospice-team/>).

Throughout this new year my hope is that we all slow down, listen to one another and not be afraid to lean in to the grief, sadness and fear (<https://crhcf.org/Blog/The-Directors-Desk/growing-beyond-fear/>). One of the greatest gifts we have as humans is the ability to be in relationship with one another. So, sit down, pour a few cups of coffee, listen before you speak and peacefully be a healing presence for those around you.

References

1. Miller, J. E., (2001). *The Art of Being a Healing Presence*. Fort Wayne, IN: Willowgreen Publishing