Supporting Someone Who is Grieving the Loss of a Child

An excerpt from Myra Sack’s “Showing Up” class presentation about how to support, sustain and connect with one another in an authentic way.

Do’s and Don’ts & The Power of Being with Pain

Don’t say:
- S/he is in a better place.
- Everything happens for a reason.
- It's time to move on, move forward.
- Your (child, spouse, parent, grandparent) wouldn’t want you to be sad.
- It's not normal to hurt for this long.
- You can have other children.
- Don’t think about it.
- Trust in God’s plan.
- Just think happy thoughts.
- You have to get back to life.

Do say:
- S/he is missed beyond words.
- I love you.
- What do you need to be okay today?
- I thought about (child, spouse, parent, grandparent) today when I saw/heard..
- I’m with you however you need, and I know that your needs will change.
- It is normal to feel this way.
- I’m thinking about you.
- Call anytime. I’ll listen.
- Whatever comes up for you, I’m here.

Supportive Actions in Grief

ACTS OF EMOTIONAL CARING
- Emotionally sensitive communication
- Remembering the person who died
- Speaking his/her name
- Sharing memories
- Acknowledging important dates and holidays

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT
- Being present
- Allowing the expression of grief
- Listening
- Being available
- Devoting time

INSTRUMENTAL SUPPORT
- Assistance with childcare, meals, financial support, yardwork, housekeeping, etc.
- Written notes and gifts

SOCIAL SUPPORT
- Foster a sense of connection with like others
- Identify and recommend support groups
- Help to engage with extended communities (faith, school, neighborhood)

In my own words, showing up is:

A lot like love. It’s unconditional, and selfless, and while you can’t always see it, you can feel it. It’s not a one-time gesture, or even ever about an event itself. It’s a consistent, ever-present way of being with people that makes them feel like they matter. And to feel like we matter in this world of 8 billion human beings is the greatest gift we can give to each other.

Source: Bearing the Unbearable, Dr. Joanne Cacciatore