

Companioning Philosophy

Dr. Wolfelt's 11 Tenets of Caring for the Bereaved

by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.
www.center-for-loss.com

Companioning the bereaved is not about assessing, analyzing, fixing or resolving another's grief. Instead, it is about being totally present to the mourner, even being a temporary guardian of her soul. The companioning model is anchored in the "teach me" perspective. It is about learning and observing.

If your desire is to support a fellow human in grief, you must create a "safe place" for people to embrace their feelings of profound loss. This safe place is a cleaned-out, compassionate heart. It is the open heart that allows you to be truly present to another human being's intimate pain.

In sum, companioning is the art of bringing comfort to another by becoming familiar with her story (experiences and needs). Of course this may well involve tears and sorrow and tends to involve a give and take of story. I tell you my story and you tell me yours. It is a sharing in a deep and profound way.

More specifically, for me...

1. Companioning is about being present to another person's pain; it is not about taking away the pain.
2. Companioning is about going to the wilderness of the soul with another human being; it is not about thinking you are responsible for finding the way out.
3. Companioning is about honoring the spirit; it is not about focusing on the intellect.
4. Companioning is about listening with the heart; it is not about analyzing with the head.
5. Companioning is about bearing witness to the struggles of others; it is not about judging or directing these struggles.
6. Companioning is about walking alongside; it is not about leading or being led.
7. Companioning means discovering the gifts of sacred silence; it does not mean filling up every moment with words.
8. Companioning the bereaved is about being still; it is not about frantic movement forward.
9. Companioning is about respecting disorder and confusion; it is not about imposing order and logic.
10. Companioning is about learning from others; it is not about teaching them.
11. Companioning is about curiosity; it is not about expertise.