

Conscious Acts of Grace

If you are alive, you will experience loss in your life. Other than birth, it is the one experience we all share. Yet, in wanting to avoid the anticipated pain, we avoid talking about death. The anguish and the suffering of death can be deep and invasive. We are, therefore, unprepared for loss experiences and find ourselves having to manage while in the midst of crisis and suffering.

There is another way. Conscious acts of grace are those touches, words, and actions that let our loved ones know we are there for them at the end of their physical life. They are the acts of unselfishness, of forgiveness, of kindness, and compassion. They are the acts of highest love that allow us to release someone from our physical world, out of their pain and tiredness. They are acts of grace that allow for ease, caring, luminosity, and bliss.

Inspired by the *Random Acts of Kindness* books, Liza Ely started collecting stories of how to experience this grace and identified common elements and practices:

1. LISTENING

The art of listening seems to be the most difficult skill for most of us humans to learn. True listening, deep listening, listening with heart!

ACT OF LISTENING: When visiting someone ill, sit quietly by their bedside and just take their hand. Allow them to direct the subject of the conversation. Allow for long pauses, knowing that what comes next is often profound.

2. SUPPORT

Being supported means asking for what we need. It means being willing to receive the love and support from others. It means being discerning in knowing who to call upon for the desired need. Most importantly, it means being there for others.

ACT OF SUPPORT: Let others know of desires and needs and ask for help.

3. DIGNITY

Affording other's dignity may mean putting our own agenda on hold. It may mean keeping our mouth shut and staying away from judgment. Our greatest choice is to just love them where they are.

ACT OF DIGNITY: Remember to listen to what the other is requesting and ask, "What do you need right now?"

4. FAITH

Even if we have lived a life of kindness and caring and have been involved with our faith of choice, we may experience great fear at the time of our death. Dying is the ultimate leap of faith! Death is beyond knowing, beyond knowledge.

ACT OF FAITH: Listen to their fears, without discounting or minimizing. Acknowledge that you hear their concerns.

5. LETTING GO

Being with others as they let go, supporting them in the process of dying, can actually provide a deep healing within ourselves.

ACT OF LETTING GO: Write and rip. Write out everything you are thinking and feeling, with no editing or censoring. Keep writing until you are "done." Rip it up. Wash your hands.

6. FORGIVENESS

I am convinced that forgiveness is the most important consideration at the end of our life, forgiveness to ourselves for our own mistakes and forgiveness to others for their mistakes.

When we hold onto anger and bitterness, it is as if a part of our energy is anchored in a previous time and place. If we think of our brain as a computer, it is as if we have left a computer program open. Although minimized, except when a memory or situation brings it to the forefront, it is still taking up our "disk space." It is not allowing us to be our best because it is always running in the background. It is always "running" in our heart.

ACT OF FORGIVENESS: Identify the emotional, physical, social, and spiritual "costs" of holding onto your resentment and anger. Identify a new possibility in which you can reclaim your life of fullness.

7. Celebration Circles

Have you ever experienced the deep sadness that comes from having left something unsaid to a loved one? Have you ever attended a memorial service and said you wished your loved one could have been there to hear all of the stories and the endearing things said about him/her?

A Celebration Circle is a gathering of family and friends to share stories and experiences with our loved ones while they are still with us. They get to hear, "My life is different because you ____" They get to hear, "Your presence made a difference in our world."

ACTS OF CELEBRATION CIRCLES: Identify the who, what, when, where, and how and create a circle!

LIZA ELY is a licensed professional counselor, end-of-life coach, and professional speaker. During her three decades of professional experience in mental health and wellness, she has witnessed firsthand the power of stories for clarifying, modeling, and moving us to love-based action. She is committed to being a voice for how we can be with ourselves and one another during this season of life.

To read stories and more excerpts from *Conscious Acts of Grace – Gifts of Love and Kindness at the End-of-Life*, visit: www.centerofwellbeing.com.