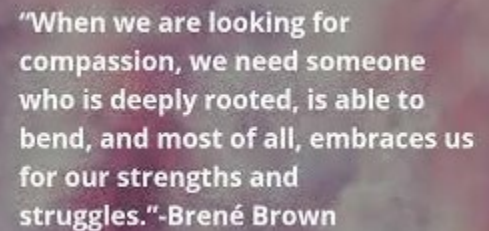


Holding Space

As we look to build our organizational culture around Belonging, Dignity and a community of caring, concern and commitment, I hope that we all look to increase our awareness, self-reflection, and shape our individual practices to support others with empathy and compassion. This month, for your consideration, I want to share a bit about the practice of “holding space.”

Holding space is the practice of being physically, mentally, and emotionally present for another. It is a way of engaging that honors the dignity of another. You intentionally put your focus on them, allowing them to be vulnerable by creating a safe space where they can experience their emotions. When you hold space for another, you offer a kind, curious, judgement-free zone for that person.

It is said that the hardest thing about holding space for another is that it can feel like you are doing nothing. In some ways this is true. Holding space is not about you. You are not there to help or fix. In other ways, you are doing the most important thing there is in that moment. Here are some tips for holding space:



“When we are looking for compassion, we need someone who is deeply rooted, is able to bend, and most of all, embraces us for our strengths and struggles.”-Brené Brown

- Listen: Listen to understand what they are saying, not to respond. Practice active listening, with your ears and your heart.
- Have unconditional positive regard: No matter who you think they are, what you think they have done, hold them with deep respect, compassion and positive regard.
- Sit with what is: Most of us react to a problem by trying to reframe it, or solve it. This is not the time. Suspend judgement and solutions and just be with them.
- Do not insert yourself: empathy can take an automatic form, where we think about ourselves in the same position and relate it to our own experiences. There is a time to share this, but not while you are focusing on another.
- Believe them: It can be incredibly difficult to be vulnerable with another. Accept their truth and express that you believe them, and believe in them. Acceptance is a state of grace.
- Allow the other person to feel whatever they are feeling: Be open to any emotions that arise. emotions can be complicated, grief, anger, sadness, grace, etc. can all come up, in a confusing and contradictory way. Reassure them that you are there for them, no matter what.

Also consider how you can hold space for yourself as well. While this does not involve having someone be physically there to listen, you can hold space for yourself whenever you are going through something – big or small – by tapping into self-compassion. This includes:

- Self-kindness: being gentle with yourself, non-critical, and understand that we all sometimes suffer, fail and feel inadequate.
- Common humanity: We are all imperfect, and we are all just people having a human experience.
- Mindfulness: be thoughtful about what you are feeling. Observe your emotions with openness, without suppressing or exaggerating them.

Holding space is not something we will master overnight. Our practice will evolve, and as we know better, we will do better.