

# SPIRITUAL CAREGIVING SILENCE

A way of being  
with another person

Lynn Bassett

# SILENCE AS CARE

**A type of silence which occurs,  
or is used, in the context of a  
professional caregiving relationship  
which supports the spiritual  
wellbeing of the other person**

# Themes of spiritual caregiving silence demonstrating increasing depth of experience

SPIRITUAL CAREGIVING SILENCE	A way of being with another person	A medium for communication	An enabler of change
 <p>Depth</p>	<p>A dimension of self (disposition) in relationship with the other (companionship)</p>	<p>A balance between silence and words (silence as gaps and pauses)</p>	<p>Creates caregiving space and time</p>
	<p>A caregiving intervention (therapeutic)</p>	<p>Silence leads to a deeper place ('something going on')</p>	<p>Enables the other to stay in a difficult place  Enables articulation and expression</p>
	<p>Shared silence and common humanity (intimacy)</p>	<p>Silence as the primary mode of communication (when words are not possible or necessary)</p>	<p>Triggers emotional release  Enables connection and reconnection</p>
<p><b>Observed effects:</b></p>	 <p>Acceptance, restoration, peace</p>		

# Disposition

“It’s not doing silence, it’s being silence, being with silence”. *Jonathan*

“I have to be present ... but not in the way”. *James*

# Companionship

“As it came near the end, he was unable to do anything or speak to anyone. And I would sit there with him just holding his hand. And, one day he was pulling me . . . And as I leaned in, he just kissed me on the cheek. It was really powerful. It almost felt like a goodbye or thank you.” *Tom*

# Therapeutic intervention

“It is then that I find myself stilling – perhaps counter-intuitively because it is easy to get caught up in the banter.

If I can still myself and intensify my patient focus then I may affect, bring down, or at least balance the level of noise in the room.” *Lynn*

# Shared silence - intimacy

“He was able to receive gaze. . . So we were able to sit and look into each other’s eyes and hold hands in a way that you often only do with lovers. But we did that in absolute silence and respectfulness.

And it was as if John understood that I could manage the emotion of his illness. That’s what it felt like to me. He understood that I could see his suffering.”

*Clare*

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# Gaps and pauses

“I think the silences, for me, were allowing two human beings to connect...

The silences were allowing me to give him the space to speak about what mattered.

The silences were being able to live with the silences that happen in life when there isn't an answer.” *Charles*

# 'Something going on'

And that's when the silence came ...

She stopped talking ... Eye contact was different ... Her eyes were looking down at her hands and not at me ... And I felt uncomfortable because it just seemed right to allow the silence. *Chris*

# Primary mode of communication

“It was literally very peaceful all around ... It was almost, not breaking through that with words. There was that spiritual breath connection from soul to soul. I’m sure you can say that about a couple that know each other well; they don’t have to say that they love each other, they know it. It’s the energy between the two. And I believe strongly that there is a soul-to-soul dialogue that ... doesn’t use words.” *Jonathan*

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# Caregiving space and time

“Part of the privilege of spiritual care is that we don’t require anything of the other person.

And, if they require nothing of us, then silence is the shared experience.

You’re still alongside that person and it is a matter of care through presence”. *Steve*

# Enables the other

“[Silence] did many things: it enabled him to, quietly assimilate his thoughts and what he wanted to convey.”

“We soon realised that if we made time away, that would give him a buffer to cope and to be held, safely”. *Jill*

# Connection and reconnection

“Words can help people make that connection for themselves but silence can do that definitely. So it's being able to just ... be still with someone and ... you can ... very clearly see that connection happening.” *Paul*

# Acceptance, restoration, peace

“To find a stillness allows for a restoration, or even a new comprehension within the person or their worth and value simply as a human being”. *Steve*

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# Spiritual Caregiving Silence

- ❑ A way of being with another person
- ❑ Complementary to speech and non-verbal communication
- ❑ Evokes a sense of connection and companionship
- ❑ Creates accompanied space
- ❑ A means of, and a medium for, communication
- ❑ Potential to enable change – expression of truth
- ❑ Opportunity for acceptance, restoration, peace

# Your experience

## Storytellers:

- ▣ No more than 5 minutes
- ▣ Tell what happened/ what you observed
- ▣ Tell how it felt for you

## Listeners:

- ▣ Listen to the whole story
- ▣ Be aware of your own silence
- ▣ Can you expand the silences?

**5 minutes to reflect / deepen understanding**

**Swap roles**

# What types of silence came up?

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A way of being with another person  
which evokes a sense of connection  
and companionship and has the  
potential to enable change

## References

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