

6 Things Your Friends in Crisis Wish You Knew

Let me start by saying: I certainly do not speak for everyone in crisis. There are a million different kinds of people and a million different kinds of battle. I've tried to stick to things I've heard many times from many people, but this list reflects my four years in the trenches more than anything else.

1. Sometimes your life is hard to look at. I will try to attend your daughter's wedding, and I will be so happy for her. But I will look away when her father walks her down the aisle and I will leave before the daddy-daughter dance. These things are too much for me. I'm not mad; I'm just swimming through some deep-water feelings about the future. I don't need hugs or help; I just need a little room to breathe, and none of it is your fault. This is my heartache. For some, it's seeing an anniversary celebration on Facebook or flirtatious banter between a husband and wife. For others, it's witnessing the baby milestone while imagining how old their own would be. Different things are difficult for different people. Just know that while we love you, sometimes your world is hard to look at. We know you have problems, too, and we're not jealous of your life—we're jealous for the life we used to have before our battle broke out (or the life we're wishing for that hasn't quite started yet). Action point for armies: Don't stop inviting us into your lives, but give us grace when we need to look away for a bit.

2. How much we feel like talking about our battle can vary wildly. Some days are very difficult and so I will answer questions abruptly in order to save us both from my messy emotional breakdown. Some days it's very cathartic to talk about it. So, how can you as my friend, know which day it is? You can't. And this is when it's hard to be you (and I'm

sorry); but what you can do is ask: “How are things with Steve?” followed up immediately by, “I understand if you’d rather not talk about it.” Perfect. You’ve shown me you care and also given me an easy exit should I choose to use it. And let me add—even when I don’t feel I can give a detailed answer, it really does matter to me that people ask. (So thank you, sweet friends, for the question. And thank you for understanding when I can’t linger over the answer.)

3. We’re secretly afraid you’ll grow weary and disappear. We don’t fear it because we doubt your character, we fear it because we would probably choose to leave our battlefield too, if given the option. Through tears, I type this: I can’t imagine what I would do if I lost my friends as well. I just can’t imagine. I know so many people who run out of steam in supporting a friend and then they’re embarrassed to step back into the battle again. Don’t be give a call and say, “I miss you. Can I bring over some mac and cheese?”

4. We still want to fight for you, too. Don’t stop telling us what you’re going through, don’t stop asking us to pray. It gives me comfort to know I’m not the only one in a fierce fight, and it gives me courage to know that I still have something to offer the world outside my war.

5. We love you. And we’d be lost without your friendship. Even when we lack the strength to say it or show it, please just know it.

6. We don’t need answers as much as we need *you*. Everyone who deals with a difficult diagnosis also deals with a landslide of medical advice from friends, acquaintances and complete strangers. It’s exhausting. I’m working really hard to get through the demands of each day—taking time to read a book about a miracle cure that Steve’s doctor has never heard about is, honestly, just not an option right now.

I have a small group of trusted advisers who have tackled some

of that research for me and made recommendations based on their findings, but we cannot pursue every option out there, and I sometimes feel people are frustrated with me for not trying their suggestions. Action point for armies is simple: Extend advice cautiously, if at all, and make sure that your friend knows you'll love them whether or not they try what you're suggesting.

Bo Stern is a blogger and author of *Beautiful Battliefields* (NavPress). She knows the most beautiful things can come out of the hardest times. Her Goliath came in the form of her husband's terminal illness, a battle they are still fighting with the help of their four children, a veritable army of friends, and our extraordinary God. Bo is a teaching pastor at Westside Church in Bend, Oregon.