

# Working Through FEAR

by *Eloise Cole, a.k.a. Rainbow, the Clown*

At "Gateway to the Heart," Eloise shared the acronym FEAR with us. I asked her to write it up for our newsletter. Eloise works in Phoenix, AZ as a grief counselor.

We can feel really helpless when visiting someone who has life changing circumstances. We may be visiting some in a hospital setting; extended care facility or perhaps working with someone who has experienced other difficult changes in their lives, such as a divorce or death.

As clowns we want to cheer people up or provide distraction to the people we are visiting. Sometimes that is not appropriate. Our gift to them can be accepting where they are. It can feel scary to enter a room and not know what to expect. We sometimes get caught up in the fear. What if I say or do the wrong thing? What can I do to make things better for them? What if they want to talk about their illness or dying?

Out of fear we sometimes build scenarios up in our mind. We create catastrophes that have not yet occurred. When we get caught up in our own fear it takes away from our being able to be present to those we are there to see. Fear can be broken down to be "Future Events Appearing Real" – F E A R. Being uncomfortable and not in control of the circumstances, we can get tied up in the "what ifs" or may even disregard the verbal or non-verbal signals of those we are there to support.

Fear can be converted to allowing ourselves to be uncomfortable but ignoring the discomfort to be present to others. A way to look at fear is taking those uncomfortable feelings and converting them to "Friendly, Empathetic, Appropriate and Responsive" actions.

**F**riendly - certainly as clowns we want to be friendly; however, in some situations, that means approaching the person slowly, so that they can absorb the reality of our visit. It also means knowing that not everyone is ready for a visit. Asking permission to visit gives the person the opportunity to say no and provides them with a choice. If we assume they want us to visit, we are taking away their personal power to make choices.

**E**mpathy is a willingness to listen and support someone. It is not about identifying with what's going on with them. "Oh, I have a friend that went through that," is a comment that brings the focus back to you and away from the person who needs to be listened to. Sympathy looks down on someone – you poor person. It is pity and can result making the person feel worse not better.

**A**ppropriate calls for us to be available to that person. Being aware of our own tone of voice and body language. If we are really loud, make a lot of sudden movements, introduce a lot of action or props in the visit or use closed body language we are distancing ourselves. It is important to take our clues from what we see going on.

**R**esponsive. In visiting the seriously ill or those dealing with challenging circumstances we want to be responsive to their needs. If they need to talk about their circumstances it is important to LISTEN, not provide answers or discount what they are saying. If they want to distance themselves from their challenges and play with us, then we have the opportunity to support them with some of our clown skills.

Visiting with those in challenging circumstances can be a wonderful gift. It can also be a gift for us. One of the keys is not to let our own discomfort stand in the way of connection with others. As we work through our own discomfort and fear, we are then truly emotionally and physically available to others.