

Checking In

Category: Racism

written by Mimi Emig | June 6, 2020

My black friends and colleagues have been through a lot in the past few months. They are not okay.

Many have lost family and friends to COVID. Lay-offs have affected my black friends more than my white friends. Recent murders of blacks, at the hands of police and civilians, show the continued deadly effects of American racism. I try to check in with them, drawing on my own experience with chronic illness and what I've learned from support I've received.

I try to do more than just "like" a post on social media or even comment on a post. Personal contact, in any way I can achieve it, is *far* more meaningful.

Small acts of kindness go a long way. If it's someone you don't know well, try buying a cup of coffee, writing a card, or dropping off flowers or a treat.

With people I know better, I check in by phone; in non-COVID times, it would have been in person.

During my years of living with chronic disease, the most helpful people have been the ones who checked in on me without my reaching out. The least helpful were the ones who then started talking about their "stomach flu" and how miserable they'd felt, while I was dealing with my fifth pneumonia of the year.

Now, when I check in with my friends, I actively listen. I don't interject my story. This is not the time to tell them how the police pulled me over once. I don't turn it around to talk about how the situation is affecting me.

I listen. Sometimes, I've caught an earful. I don't get defensive. I don't dismiss their experience—it is theirs, not mine. Recognizing how different their experience is from mine is important. I step up to help where I can.

I don't put my black friends on a pedestal. I'd been annoyed when my friends had called me "brave" or "strong" through my illness. They have no choice. They are living in an unjust society.

I'm far from perfect. There are times when I've failed my friends. When that happens, I call, admit I've been absent, and work to move forward.

Be kind. Connect. Listen. Be humble.

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