

Kendra Stearns Drozd: Why Presence Matters More Than Advice When Someone Is Struggling

Kendra Stearns Drozd, a commissioned Stephen Minister based in Bluffton, South Carolina, explains how consistent, judgment-free presence helps people heal from grief, loss, and life crises.

Bluffton, South Carolina Aug 24, 2026 ([IssueWire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - When Fixing Becomes the Problem

Sarah sat across from her friend at coffee, tears streaming down her face as she talked about her recent miscarriage. Before she could finish, her friend interrupted with a list of solutions: hormone tests, new doctors, diets, supplements. Sarah left feeling more isolated than before she shared.

Six months later, Sarah found herself sitting with a Stephen Minister who did something different. She listened. She did not try to fix. She simply showed up, week after week, without judgment or unsolicited advice. For the first time in months, Sarah felt less alone.

This difference between fixing and presence is at the heart of how Kendra Stearns Drozd approaches emotional support. A commissioned Stephen Minister since 2012, she has walked alongside dozens of people facing grief, divorce, illness, loneliness, and loss. Her insight comes from both professional training and personal experience.

"People are carrying so much privately," Drozd says. "Sometimes what they need most is not someone trying to fix them. They need someone willing to sit with them, listen to them, and walk beside them without judgment."

The Framework That Helped Her Understand People

Drozd's career began in advertising in Chicago, where she worked at Lois/EJL on quick-service restaurant, hardware, and automotive accounts. After earning her MBA at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management, she joined Kraft Foods as a Senior Associate Brand Manager. She conducted in-home ethnographic research, observing families during after-school and dinner routines to identify product opportunities.

Later, as an executive recruiter at Bloom, Gross & Associates, she matched consumer packaged goods marketing professionals with the right roles. Each stage of her career reinforced the same lesson: understanding people is the most valuable skill you can build.

"The common thread has always been understanding people," she explains. "In advertising, I needed to understand consumers. At Kraft, I needed to understand customer behavior. In recruiting, I needed to understand candidates and employers. As a Stephen Minister, I need to understand what someone is experiencing and how to support them."

After the birth of her third child, Drozd stepped away from full-time work to focus on raising her four daughters and volunteering in her community. She became a Stephen Minister in 2012, providing confidential one-on-one emotional and spiritual support to individuals experiencing life crises.

The Statistics Behind Loneliness and Support

Recent research underscores the urgency of the problem Drozd addresses every day. Loneliness increases the risk of premature death by nearly 30 percent. Nearly one in five adults frequently feel lonely or disconnected. In a culture that moves fast, healing usually happens slowly.

"We live in a culture that moves fast," Drozd notes. "But healing usually happens slowly. Sometimes the most meaningful thing you can do is continue showing up."

Her own experience shaped her commitment to this work. During years of personal hardship, people carried her through simply by showing up.

"There were people who carried me through those years simply by showing up," she says. "That changed me. It made me want to give that same kind of support back to others."

Copy This Framework: Five Phases to Support Someone Through Crisis

You do not need to be a therapist to care for someone. Here is a five-phase approach anyone can follow.

Phase 1: Show Up Consistently Reach out regularly, even when you do not know what to say. Presence matters more than perfect words. Schedule a recurring coffee date, phone call, or walk. Consistency builds trust.

Phase 2: Listen Without Fixing Resist the urge to offer solutions or advice unless directly asked. Let the person share their story at their own pace. Your job is to listen, not to solve.

Phase 3: Validate Their Experience Acknowledge what they are feeling without minimizing it. Say things like "That sounds incredibly hard" instead of "Everything happens for a reason." Validation helps people feel seen.

Phase 4: Offer Specific Help Instead of "Let me know if you need anything," offer concrete actions: "Can I bring dinner Tuesday?" or "Would a ride to your appointment help?" Specific offers are easier to accept.

Phase 5: Respect Their Timeline Healing does not follow a schedule. Do not rush someone to "move on" or "feel better." Keep showing up, even when progress feels slow.

Quick Wins: Small Actions That Make a Big Difference

- Send a text that says "Thinking of you today" without expecting a response.
- Drop off a meal without requiring a visit.
- Remember important dates like anniversaries of loss and check in.
- Sit in silence if words feel insufficient.
- Ask "How are you really doing?" and wait for the real answer.

Red Flags: What Not to Do When Someone Is Struggling

- Do not compare their pain to someone else's situation.
- Avoid clichés like "God has a plan" or "At least..."
- Do not disappear because you feel uncomfortable.
- Never share their story without permission.

- Stop trying to cheer them up or distract them from grief.

The Shift From Productivity to Presence

Drozd's definition of success has evolved over the years. Early in her career, success looked like promotions, projects, and packed schedules. Today, it looks different.

"I've learned that being productive isn't about packing as much as possible into a day," she reflects. "It's about giving my full attention to whatever I'm doing."

She now measures success by whether she spent her time on things that actually mattered.

"Today, success is much quieter," she says. "It's about knowing I spent my time on things that actually mattered."

A Call to Action: Apply This Framework This Week

Think of one person in your life who is struggling. Maybe they are grieving a loss, navigating a health crisis, or feeling isolated. Instead of waiting for them to reach out, take the first step.

Send a message. Offer specific help. Schedule a time to listen. Use the five-phase framework this week and notice what happens when you shift from fixing to presence.

You do not have to be a therapist to care for someone. You can check in on a friend. You can listen instead of trying to give advice. You can make someone feel less alone.

Start today.

About Kendra Stearns Drozd

[Kendra Stearns Drozd](#) is a commissioned Stephen Minister, former executive recruiter, and brand manager based in Bluffton, South Carolina. She began her career in advertising in Chicago at Lois/EJL, later serving as Senior Associate Brand Manager at Kraft Foods and as an executive recruiter at Bloom, Gross & Associates. Since 2012, she has provided confidential one-on-one emotional and spiritual support to individuals facing grief, divorce, illness, loneliness, and life crises. She holds a B.A. in English from Williams College and an M.B.A. from Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management.

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Source : Kendra Stearns Drozd

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