

Yesterday, a well-meaning neighbor walked by, and we were catching up.

I told her about my daughter's dog, and then I told her we just found out about my son's dog having cancer, too, and I said, "It's been a bit too much, too much piling on right now."

Then she said, "Well, at least you don't have a child dying of cancer."

She went on to detail what is happening to a mutual acquaintance of ours and how awful it is, etc.

And it was, of course, and I very much felt ashamed at that point for having the audacity to talk about my children's dog's issues.

But later I didn't. I felt dismissed.

Here's what's actually going on when someone says, **"Well, at least you don't have a child that's dying..."**

It's called *comparative suffering*.

It's when someone tries to "rank" pain. The idea is that if someone else is going through something objectively "worse," your pain should somehow shrink.

But pain doesn't work like that.

Pain isn't a competition.

And you don't need to earn your right to be upset by qualifying your suffering against someone else's.

It's often more about *their discomfort*.

Most people don't know how to hold space for grief or pain, even the everyday kind.

So instead of validating it, they try to reframe it to something they *can* manage—by shrinking it or distancing it.

They're essentially saying: "Let's not go too deep, let's shift gears to something I feel safer commenting on."

It *is* dismissive—whether they mean it or not.

Suffering is suffering. Grief is grief.

Watching your child go through something painful—whether it's a dying dog or a broken heart—**hurts like hell.**

And it matters. **To try to "at least" it away is to say:**
What you're feeling doesn't deserve full empathy.

And that's a lie.

So why do people do it?

- They're trying to help (poorly).
- They're emotionally unequipped.
- They don't realize it *hurts more than it helps*.
- They've internalized the toxic belief that only the worst suffering deserves airtime.

What to do when this happens:

- **You can name it silently** for yourself: "This person is trying to fix discomfort with comparison. That's about them, not me."
- **You can gently push back:** "Yes, what they're going through is unimaginable. But this is really hard for my son, too. And it matters."
- Or you can let it go if the moment isn't worth the energy—but give yourself **full permission** to feel what you feel without shame.

Your pain doesn't need to be the worst in the room to be **valid, real, and worthy of compassion**. Let them keep their comparisons. You just keep your heart open—right where it is.