

Tips for Friends and Family

Grief and mourning can be difficult, not just for you, but for your friends, family, and associates, as well. The people in your life may want very much to help, but simply not know how.

Share these tips with your friends as a guide to supporting you during this difficult time. If it's easier for you, print this page and give it to them.

WHEN YOUR FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER IS GRIEVING

When someone you know experiences a major loss, it can be very difficult for you, too. You may feel torn about calling or visiting. You may even put off contacting her. You may have many fears: Fear that you will say the “wrong thing”, fear that your expression of caring will cause her to cry/feel worse, fear that it will be awkward and uncomfortable, and so on.

Whatever you do, do NOT let these fears stop you from offering needed care and comfort. In other words, call, visit, and send notes. In whatever ways you are able to, convey to the person that you care, and you want to help and be available.

What to say is a big issue for most of us. Some basic suggestions about helpful and not-so-helpful things to say are listed below, but please remember the old adage: **ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS**. In the case of loss, words are not nearly as important as the gesture of reaching out to someone in need. If you really care, that will come through in your willingness to show up, in your willingness to spend time together, in your willingness to listen. If you show up, are honest, and show that you genuinely care, you can get away with saying the “wrong thing”. Your kindness and caring are what your friend or loved one will remember. The fact that you took the time, you expressed genuine concern, you listened, or you just sat quietly with them, these are the things she will remember. She will also remember if you stay away.

The concern about what to say is common and comes from the mistaken belief that we have to somehow “fix” the person. The best thing you can do for yourself and for your bereaved loved one or friend is to accept the reality that there is nothing you can do that will “fix” her. Just go, and **BE** with your loved one. There is nothing more important than the presence of a caring person.

The Visitor – a poem

*You came and did not try
To cheer us up with facile jokes
Or false philosophy or some pious cliché
About how God knows best.
You did not attempt to comfort, console, or pray,
But sat with us a while.
And by your simple presence seemed to say
I'm here, I understand and share your pain. (Author Unknown)*



WHAT TO SAY, AND NOT TO SAY

Regarding what to say and what not to say, here are a few suggestions. Adapt them according to your own personality and who it is you are supporting.

- Do say: “I am here for you.”
- Do say: “I don’t know what to say. I know this is devastating for you. It is hard for me too. I want to help you and I don’t know how. I care about you.”
- Do say: “If you ever need to talk, I am willing to listen. I can’t fix it for you, but I’d be glad to listen.”
- Do say: “If you ever need a break from your grief, and you would like to go do something together, let me know. I would be glad to provide you with some distraction.”
- Do say: “If you need help with practical things, like mowing the lawn, preparing a meal, etc., I would love to do that for you on Saturday,” (or whatever day you have available).
- Do NOT give unsolicited advice. Avoid statements like: “You need to . . .” or “You should . . .”
- Do NOT assume the role of God’s spokesperson. In other words, do not say things such as, “This was God’s will.” “God does not give you any more than you can handle.” “God needed him more than you.” (How do any of us know?)
- Do NOT say things, such as, “They are better off.” (Again, how do we know?)
- Avoid suggesting time limits for someone’s grief. There is no time limit. It will take as long as it takes for each individual. Everyone’s process of grief and mourning is unique.

