

# Tips for Supporting a Grieving Person

It's often hard to know what to say or do when someone you care about is grieving. You may be afraid of intruding saying the wrong thing, or making the person feel even worse. Or maybe you feel there's little you can do to make things better. While you can't take away the pain of the loss, you can provide much needed comfort and support. There are many ways to help a grieving friend or family member, starting with letting the person know you care.

## **Listen With Compassion**

Almost everyone worries about what to say to a grieving person. But knowing how to listen is much more important. Oftentimes, well-meaning people avoid talking about the death or mentioning the deceased person, but the bereaved need to feel that his or her loss is acknowledged, it's not too terrible to talk about, and his or her loved one won't be forgotten.

While you should never try to force someone to open up, it's important to let the bereaved know he or she has permission to talk about the loss. Talk candidly about the person who died and don't steer away from the subject if the deceased's name comes up. When it seems appropriate, ask sensitive questions—without being nosy—that invite the grieving person to openly express his or her feelings. Try simply asking, “Do you feel like talking?”

## **Offer practical assistance**

It is difficult for many grieving people to ask for help. They might feel guilty about receiving so much attention, fear being a burden, or be too depressed to reach out. You can make it easier for them by making specific suggestions—such as, “I'm going to the market this afternoon. What can I bring you from there?” or “I've made beef stew for dinner. When can I come by and bring you some?”

Consistency is very helpful, if you can manage it—being there for as long as it takes. This helps the grieving person look forward to your attentiveness without having to make the additional effort of asking again and again. You can also convey an open invitation by saying, “Let me know what I can do,” which may make a grieving person feel more comfortable about asking for help. But keep in mind that the bereaved may not have the energy or motivation to call you when he or she needs something, so it's better if you take the initiative to check in.

## **Provide ongoing support**

Grieving continues long after the funeral is over and the cards and flowers have stopped. The length of the grieving process varies from person to person. But in general, grief lasts much longer than most people expect. Your bereaved friend or family member may need your support for months or even years.

## **Watch for warning signs**

It's common for a grieving person to feel depressed, confused, disconnected from others, or like he or she is going crazy. But if the bereaved person's symptoms don't gradually start to fade—or they get worse with time—this may be a sign that normal grief has evolved into a more serious problem, such as clinical depression.