

How to Help A Grieving Friend

Purpose: To discuss death and grieving so you have some ideas about ways to help a grieving friend. We receive very little training in how to deal with death and grieving. We don't know how and when to use our words and actions to offer assistance and consolation. Researchers and authors have provided many effective suggestions, but initially they may seem very counter-intuitive to our established and normal perceptions.

What is Grieving- the process of experiencing the (1) psychological (through your feelings, thoughts and attitudes), (2) social (through your behavior with others) and (3) physical (through your health and body systems) reactions to your perception of loss.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, the book On Death and Dying and the 5 Stages of Grief

1. Denial
2. Anger
3. Bargaining
4. Depression
5. Acceptance
6. Are these accurate stages of grief for grieving people? No!

Types of Death

1. anticipated death- there is some notice
2. sudden death- car or work accident, heart attack, war, suicide, murder
3. symbolic death- sports figures, celebrities, entertainers, popular leaders, etc.

What Typically Happens- a person dies, arrangements are made, word spreads, the evening viewing, a funeral or memorial service, food and sympathy cards delivered for 2 weeks, then NOTHING- silence, next is to address the burdens of financial decisions as well as legal, property transfer and probate issues and reality sets in

How do you, as a friend, feel?

1. helpless- there's nothing you can do to change the circumstance or fix things
2. awkward- you don't know what to say or how your actions may be viewed
3. guilt- did you do enough, often enough; what were your last meetings, conversations; was there unfinished business or unresolved conflict?
4. survivor guilt- waiver between "it should have been me", "why wasn't it me" and "I'm glad it's not me."

How does the griever feel?

1. Grief-induced ADD
2. lost, empty, overwhelmed, confused, angry, numb, responsible, guilty- may be glad they're dead, relieved- no more care giving, conflicted
3. questioning and wondering about the medical decisions made or treatments
4. asking why God did this to me and other religious questions

What do grievers really want

1. they want your company- they want you to be there and available.
2. they want to be able to talk about anything, especially the deceased.
3. they want you to listen and not say anything, not judge them, not try to fix them, not tell them what to do and not tell them what they should do.
4. they don't want open-ended questions where thinking is required- give them a well defined choice and they'll pick one.

10 Things You Should Never Say

1. How are you doing?
2. I know how you feel.
3. The same thing happened to me.
4. Don't cry.
5. It's for the best or It's a blessing.
6. You'll marry again or You'll have another child.
7. It could have been worse.
8. Time heals.
9. These things happen.
10. They're in a better place.

Ideas About What You CAN Do

1. Do talk about the deceased- it really helps the griever.
2. Don't make the most painful mistake- to say or to do nothing.
3. Humor can be a great healer and a significant stress reducer.
4. Don't impose your expectations on their grief or their way of grieving.
5. Grief isn't linear- expect the unexpected and tell the griever it's normal.
6. Don't make it about you- don't talk about your problems or losses you've experienced, even if asked; don't be a grief trumper either.
7. Think of ways to pay tribute to the deceased- their favorite charity, etc.
8. Be open to grief's lessons and blessings and how they can change your life.

Myth or Reality?

All losses are about the same.

It takes about two months to get over your grief.

Most bereaved people grieve in the same way.

Grief always declines over time in a steadily decreasing fashion.

When grief is resolved, it rarely comes up again.

Family members will help grievers.

Children grieve like adults.

Feeling sorry for your self is not allowable.

It is better to put painful things out of your mind.

You should not think about your deceased loved one at the holidays because it'll make you too sad.

By expressing their feelings, bereaved individuals will resolve their grief.

Expressing feelings that are intense is the same as losing control.

There is no reason to be angry at your deceased loved one.

Only unhealthy or sick individuals have physical problems in grief.

Because you feel crazy, you are going crazy.

You should feel only sadness that your loved one has died.

Infant death shouldn't be too difficult to resolve because you didn't know the child that well.

Children need to be protected from grief and death.

Rituals and funerals are unimportant in helping us deal with life and death in contemporary America.

Being upset and grieving means that you do not believe in God or trust in your religion.

You will have no relationship with your loved one after the death.

The intensity and length of your grief are testimony to your love for the deceased.

There is something wrong with you if you think that part of you has died with your loved one.

If someone has lost a spouse, he or she knows what it is like to lose a child.

When in doubt about what to say to a bereaved person, offer a cliché.

You will not be affected much if your parent dies when you are an adult.

Once your loved one has died, it is better not to focus on him or her, but to put him or her in the past and go on with your life.

It is not important for you to have social support in your grief.

Losing someone to sudden death is the same as losing someone to an anticipated death.

If you are a widow, you should grieve pretty much like other widows.

When you grieve, you grieve for the loss of that person and nothing else.

Grief may affect you psychologically, but in no other way.

You can find ways to avoid the pain of your grief and still resolve it successfully.

Parents usually divorce after a child dies.

It is better to tell bereaved people to “Be brave” and “Keep a stiff upper lip” because then they will not have to experience as much pain.