

A Guide for Those Helping Others with Grief

Don't try to find the magic words or formula to eliminate the pain.

Nothing can erase or minimize the painful tragedy your friend or loved one is facing. Your primary role at this time is simply "to be there." Don't worry about what to say or do, just be a presence that the person can lean on when needed.

Don't try to minimize or make the person feel better.

When we care about someone, we hate to see them in pain. Often we'll say things like, "I know how you feel," or "perhaps, it was for the best," in order to minimize their hurt. While this can work in some instances, it never works with grief.

Help with responsibilities.

Even though a life has stopped, life doesn't. One of the best ways to help is to run errands, prepare food, take care of the kids, do laundry and help with the simplest of maintenance.

Don't Expect the person to reach out to you. Many people say, "call me if there is anything I can do." At this stage, the person who is grieving will be overwhelmed at the simplest thought of picking up a phone. If you are close to this person, simply stop over and being to help. People need this but don't have the energy to ask.

Talk through decisions.

While working through the grief process many bereaved people report difficulty with decision making. Be a sounding board for your friend or loved one and help them think through decisions.

Don't be afraid to say the name of the deceased.

Those who have lost someone usually speak of them often, and believe it or not, need to hear the deceased name and stories. In fact, many griever welcome this.

Remember that time does not heal all wounds.

Your friend and love one will chance because of what has happened. Everyone grieves differently. Some will be "fine" and then experience their true grief a year later, others will grieve immediately. There are no timetables, no rules –be patient.

Remind the bereaved to take care of themselves.

Eating, resting and self-care are all difficult tasks when besieged by the taxing emotions of grief. You can help by keeping the house stocked with healthy foods that are already prepared or easy-to-prepare. Help with the laundry. Take over some errands so the bereaved can rest. However, do not push the bereaved to do things they may not be ready for. Many griever say, "I wish they would just follow my lead." While it may be upsetting to see the bereaved withdrawing from people and activities- it is normal. They will rejoin as they are ready.

Avoid judging.

Don't tell the person how to react or handle their emotions or situation. Simply let him/her know that you support their decisions and will help in any way possible.

Share a meal.

Invite the bereaved over regularly to share a meal or take a meal to their home since meal times can be especially lonely. Consider inviting the bereaved out on important dates like the one month anniversary of the death, the deceased's birthday, etc.

Make a list of everything that needs to be done with the bereaved.

This could include everything from bill paying to plant watering. Prioritize these by importance. Help the bereaved complete as many tasks as possible. If there are many responsibilities, find one or more additional friends to support you.

Make a personal commitment to help the ones grieving get through this.

After a death, many friendships change or disintegrate. People don't know who to relate to this one who is grieving or they get tired of being around someone who is sad. Vow to see your friend or loved one through this, to be their anchor in their darkest hour.

Excerpted from "I Wasn't Ready to Say Goodbye: A Guide for Surviving, coping and healing after the sudden death of a loved one." By Brook Noel and Pamela D. Blair, Ph.D (Champion Press, 2000).

