

HOW YOU CAN BE HELPFUL TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS

The grief we feel is caused by our loss, and mourning is the process of adapting to the losses in our life. How each of us mourns depends upon the state of our readiness and our perception of the loss.

Many grief-stricken individuals don't know what they want or need. They may feel confused and have difficulty making decisions. In the interim, reassure the bereaved that he or she is not alone and offer specific and direct assistance.

USEFUL THINGS YOU CAN SAY OR DO

1. **Be There:** One of the ironies of trauma is that the person who is simply there may provide the most comfort.

- Be there with the person, sit with your family member or friend.
- Be a good listener.
- Allow for the person to tell his/her story or memories of their loved one, if they so wish.
- Know you can't solve the problem.
- Be aware of your feelings.

2. **Be Honest:**

- If you don't know how or what to say, it's okay to say that.
- Use the deceased's name when referring to him/her. Don't worry that you risk reminding the individual of what has happened. S/he has not forgotten, and is sensitive to the tendency of others to tiptoe around the subject.

3. **Keep it Simple:**

- Recognize that you're going to feel inadequate.
- Express your love and concern.
- State that you're sorry.
- Acknowledge that the loved one will be missed very much.

4. **Be Helpful:**

- If you feel the need to "do" something (and most of us will) make a concrete suggestion e.g., I'll be glad to prepare food, run errands, or answer the phone.

IT IS GOOD TO KEEP IN MIND THAT "WHAT NOT TO SAY" IS JUST AS IMPORTANT

There are many misconceptions about grief that may actually hinder the recovery process that follows grief.

1. It's natural to want to say something that will "fix" the situation or make the pain go away. Also, it is common to feel helpless and out of control. **Remember, the things you say are intended to meet the needs of the survivor, not your own.**
2. Another common "fix it" trap that you can fall into is that of giving advice, whether the survivor wants it or not. This is a way of giving control to ourselves, not to the bereaved.
3. Don't force your method of grieving: respect what the person wants. In addition, refrain from relating personal examples of loss.
4. "I know how you feel" is a statement many individuals hear and may find offensive. In times of loss, the experience feels so utterly unique that messages intended to speak of shared pain often only alienate and offend.
5. Avoid minimizing the loss: Statements that begin with "at least" or "you're lucky that" are these types of messages. Do not use clichés or simplistic, pat answers, such as:
 - "It's God's will"
 - "Time heals all wounds"
 - "Don't cry, it will be okay"
 - "S/he's happier in heaven"
 - "You have to be strong for..."
 - "Get over it"

"When a person is born, we rejoice, and when they're married, we are jubilant, but when they die, we try to pretend nothing happened."
Margaret Mead