



# WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

This is a question many of us ask after a friend or family member loses a loved one.

Often when we ask the bereaved what we can do, they say, “Oh, nothing. I’ll be ok. I’m getting along fine.” From experience, this is sometimes far from the

truth. There are numerous ways friends and family members can help ease the pain of depression and emptiness that comes when we lose a family member.

Each grief situation is different because every relationship is unique. All people grieve differently and at their own pace. Although a death may be anticipated, people cannot predict how they will react when their loved one dies. An expected death and a sudden loss are major traumatic events and such events will change most people lives forever.

Your presence at the memorial service is a thoughtful way to let the grieving family or friends know that you care. People who attend a funeral or celebration of life service are affirming that the grieving family and their departed family member are important to them and will be remembered.

It is important for you to acknowledge their loss. Many people fear that mentioning a departed loved one will only cause the bereaved more pain. They are already living with the pain of loss. Mentioning their loved one will tell them that you care and have not forgotten. It can be discouraging to the bereaved to have a conversation or meet for the first time after a death and loss isn’t mentioned at all. Most people will appreciate hearing that you’re thinking of them and that their loved one will be missed.

We should allow the bereaved the freedom to talk about their loved one...even months or years after the death. Share some of your good

memories about their loved one with them. Help them remember the special times they had...when they are ready to talk about them. If you have photos of their loved one, do share them. A parent or spouse will most often enjoy seeing a new photo and hearing your stories about their beloved.

However, despite our best intentions, there are some things that are better left unsaid because they are rarely well received. Here are a few common but hurtful responses to a person in grief:

- ❖ *They are in a better place.* (The bereaved is facing loneliness and despair...how can they be consoled by being reminded that their loved one would want to be anywhere but with them?)
- ❖ *You won't have to worry about him/her anymore.* (They would much rather worry about them than suffer through the grief of losing them.)
- ❖ *I know just how you feel.* (How can you know how they feel when each person's grief is unique?)
- ❖ *You were lucky to have him/her for that many years.* (The bereaved have a difficult time imagining even one day without their loved one.)
- ❖ *Just think of how much free time you'll have now that you won't have to care for them anymore.* (A care giver's identity is often linked to the one they care for. It was their way of showing their love.)
- ❖ *Time heals all wounds.* Or, *You'll get over him/her in time.* (Grief will last a lifetime.) *You need to move on!* (We cannot hurry the grieving process.)
- ❖ *At least you have other children.* Or, *You're still young, you'll find someone else.* (No one will ever be able to take the place of this parent, fiancé, spouse, or child. Yes, there may be others, but the hole in their heart caused by this loss will always be there.)

A person who is grieving may lose interest in everything for awhile. They are in shock and their mind is in a fog. For some, every task can be a struggle. They may simply want to be alone with their thoughts. Solitude is OK for a time, but to become isolated in grief is not healthy.

Having someone to talk to as they go through their grieving process will be a major help to them. You might open the conversation by simply saying, “How are you doing?” and then let them do the talking. Grief is like putting salve on a wound to promote healing. They need the freedom to talk without feeling judged. Offer your shoulder for them to cry on, and give them lots of hugs. Don’t offer solutions when not invited to do so. Sometimes people just want company.

A periodic call or visit will be helpful. If you sense that they are becoming reclusive or even suicidal, you might want to consider a gentle suggestion that they seek help from a professional in dealing with their loss, or contact someone closer to them who can help.

With people stopping by to visit, the bereaved may worry about the appearance and cleanliness of their home or yard, but many lack the energy to clean or do yard work. Your offer to help will usually be welcome. Sometimes, they may work along with you and enjoy the time together, or be relieved to just let you take care of it by yourself.

Grief often leaves a person without an appetite and cooking can become a chore. Providing a meal, especially if they have a family to care for, relieves a great burden. Alternatively, taking them out to dinner or inviting them to your home for an evening will help fill the void of loneliness.

Check with them to see if they need something from the store or surprise them with a special treat for the family. Do they have some errands that you could run for them? These are ways friends can participate in the grieving process in a very positive way. Walking the dog or picking up children from school may be helpful. If they respond that they don’t want to be a burden, reassure them. “It’s not a burden when you love or care for someone.”

People often send cards and other expressions of condolence, but there will come a day when there will be no more cards in the mailbox, which can be disheartening. They may suddenly feel abandoned and alone. Don’t ever think it’s too late to send a card, and you don’t have to stop with just one.

Try to remember significant dates such as anniversaries, birthdays, and the anniversary date of the death. It is very comforting to receive a call or card from a friend letting them know you remembered. It's difficult to think that people have forgotten a loved one, so receiving encouragement from someone who cares, even years later, will be tremendously comforting.

If you are a teenager or young adult and the person who died is a friend, don't hesitate to stay in touch with their parents. Because of their loss, they will miss out on many events that they were looking forward to...graduations, weddings, or even grandchildren. Although it may be difficult for them to attend special events, they will appreciate being included and knowing their child has not been forgotten.

Most importantly, keep them in your thoughts and/or prayers. Friends can help so much to bring back joy to a grieving person's life.



These are just a few helpful ideas, but the possibilities are endless. It is very rewarding to have a part in helping someone who is grieving and this can sometimes be the best way to handle our own grief.

We appreciate and thank you for taking the time to read this. You are welcome to take extra copies to others.

*One of the most thoughtful gifts you can give your family is to pre-plan your own arrangements. To discuss these benefits or any other questions you might have, please contact our office.*

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