

How can I help someone who is grieving?

When Death Occurs

There is so much to do after a death, but ordinarily, practical help is needed first.

Practical Help

- **Encourage your friend to take time out to rest.** Grief is exhausting, but if your bereaved friend is running on adrenaline, he or she may not be aware of the body's need to take a break.

Emotional Help

- **Think about how much time you can give.** Before committing yourself, determine how much time you can give without creating problems in your own family. Visits over a longer period of time are more important than many visits during the first week, when other friends and relatives are still available. With the departure of these people, the bereaved may feel isolated. Now is the time for you to start your visits, which may vary in length.
- **Learn good communication skills.** It is easy to do all of the talking, especially if you are anxious. Try not to fill every pause with chatter unless you have something important to say. Communication isn't always with words; use your eyes, as well. How does your friend look? Is he/she restless? Has his/her posture changed?
- **Be a good listener.** Listening is the most important gift you can offer a grieving person. Every time your bereaved friend tells his or her story, the reality of what has happened will sink in. The loss must become real in order for your friend to move through the process of grief. As a listener, encourage your friend to talk and express feelings.
- **Help your friend organise his or her day.** People tend to feel overwhelmed when a loved has died because there is so much to do. Help organize urgent tasks, and those that can wait until a later time. Develop a list that can be checked off when tasks are completed.
- **Share memories.** Sharing memories can be very healing. Bereaved people love to hear stories about their loved ones.
- **Watch for depression.** It is normal for bereaved people to experience some depression, and reminiscing usually helps decrease this feeling. However, if you feel concerned about the degree of depression your friend may be exhibiting, suggest seeking professional help.
- **Identify local resources.** Find further resources for your friend, such as support groups, books, or therapists who specialize in grief.
- **Take care of yourself.** Helping the bereaved is hard work. Don't forget to take care of yourself. Find someone you can talk to. Check with your family and remain aware of their needs. Take time for yourself to do something special, such as taking long walks, reading a book, watching a favourite TV program, enjoying a quiet bath or listening to some of your favourite music. Take care of yourself. Your friend will need you for a long time.

Avoid Vacuous Platitudes

People sometimes worry that they will say the wrong thing. The following are some things to avoid:

"I know how you feel." One can never know how another may feel. You could, instead, ask your friend to tell you how he or she feels.

"It's part of God's plan." This phrase can make people angry and they often respond with, "What plan? Nobody told me about any plan."

"Look at what you have to be thankful for." They know they have things to be thankful for, but right now they are not important.

"Call if you need anything." They aren't going to call. It is much better to offer something concrete, such as: "I have two free hours and I want to come over and vacuum your house or work on your lawn."

"They are in a better place now" The bereaved may or may not believe this. Keep your beliefs to yourself unless asked.

"This is behind you now; it's time to get on with your life." Sometimes the bereaved are resistant to getting on with because they feel this means "forgetting" their loved one. In addition, moving on is easier said than done. Grief has a mind of its own and works at its own pace.

Statements that begin with "You should" or "You will." These statements are too directive. Instead you could begin your comments with: "Have you thought about. . ." or "You might. . ."

Making decisions for your friend. You can help your friend make decisions by exploring the pros and cons of what or what not to do. If you make a decision and it ends up being a bad one, your friend may be very angry with you. Moreover, you may be reinforcing dependence on you.

Discouraging expressions of grief. It is best to "encourage" your friend to express grief. If your friend begins to cry, do not change the subject, rather give a hug, make a pot of coffee or find the tissues.

Promoting your own values and beliefs. Listen to your friend talk about his or her values and beliefs. It's okay to share yours as long as you are not trying to convince your friend that your way is better.

Encourage dependence. The bereaved may tend to lean on you too much. It is better to gently encourage independence with your support and guidance.

How can I deal with my own grief?

Grief is experienced whenever you lose something important to you. Grief is so powerful that people sometimes look for ways to go around it rather than experience it. This approach will not work. The best thing you can do for yourself is to work through grief and express your feelings. The following are specific ways to help yourself work through grief.

Basic Health Concerns

Grief is exhausting and it is important to continue your daily health routines.

1. Try to eat regular, nourishing meals. If it is too difficult to eat three regular meals, try 4 or 5 small ones. Have nourishing food available to nibble on rather than chips and candy.
2. Rest is important. Try to develop regular bedtime routines. If you are having a hard time getting to sleep, try a glass of warm milk or some soft easy listening music to sooth your thoughts.
3. Continue your exercise program and develop a manageable routine.
4. Meditation, perhaps in the form of prayer or yoga, can help you get the rest you need.

Outside Support

Grief does not have to be as isolating as it seems.

1. Look for a support group or counselling group to support you.
2. Let your friends and other family members know what your emotional or physical needs are. The more they know what to do to help you, the more available they will be.

Feelings

1. Read books or articles of the process of grief so you can identify what you are feeling and have some ideas on how to help yourself.
2. Allow your feelings to be expressed appropriately.
3. Crying is good. You feel lighter after you have had a good cry. Consider sharing your tears with other loved ones. We laugh together, why not cry together as well.
4. Find friends or family members to share your feelings with.
5. Be careful not to use alcohol, drugs, or tranquilizers. These will only mask the pain and could lead to problems.
6. Keeping a journal is a good way to identify feelings and also to see progress.

Be Kind to Yourself

1. If you desire some alone time, take it as often as you need to.
2. Give yourself rewards along the way as something to look forward to.
3. Carry a special letter, poem, or quote with you to read when the going gets tough.
4. Try to enjoy the good days and don't feel guilty for doing so.
5. Reach out to help someone else.
6. Remember, grief takes time. Learn to have patience with yourself.
7. Know that you will get better and there will be a time when you can look forward to getting up in the morning and be glad you are alive and that your life is continuing.