What You Can Do For A Person in Grief

Supporting someone in mourning can be difficult, as the grief process unfolds at its own pace and the needs of the bereaved evolve over time. To sustain your support, it is essential to acknowledge your own needs and boundaries. Being realistic about what you can and cannot offer will help you maintain your support without putting yourself at risk.

Provide Practical Assistance

Offer practical help with daily life and household tasks:

- Communication: Offer to make calls, or screen incoming calls and take messages.
- Meals: Bring food, or invite them over for dinner at your home.
- Household Chores: Assist with grocery shopping, laundry, and general housework.
- Outdoor/Pet Care: Help with gardening, feeding pets, or washing the car.
- Childcare: Offer to drop off or pick up children at school.
- Companionship: Accompany the person to appointments and when they run errands.

Open a Dialogue in a Safe Space

Consistently check in by asking, "How are you doing today?" or "How are you feeling?" and genuinely express your willingness to listen. Always ensure these conversations happen in a private, secure setting so the griever can answer your question if they choose to.

Be a Good Listener

Offer comfort by being there to listen to them talk about what has occurred or reminisce about their loved one. Listen to them express feelings such as anger, guilt, remorse, and yearning. Allowing the expression of deep-felt emotions is a great gift.

Validate Emotions and Experiences

Assure the person that you are a safe space where they don't need to fear being shocked or embarrassed, or of driving you away. Reiterate that all their feelings—including crying, anger, guilt, or a desire for silence—are natural and completely acceptable.

Be Patient

Remember that grieving is a long process; it can take months, even years, for a person to fully accept a loss and adjust to the resulting life changes. Therefore, offer patience as the survivor experiences shifting feelings, moods, and availability.

Maintain Communication

Connect with the grieving person through phone calls, in-person visits, or written cards. Be mindful of their schedule and try to reach out when they are more likely to be available, such as after typical work hours. Crucially, let them know they are free to decline your attempts to connect without worrying that it will negatively affect your relationship.

Reminiscing

If appropriate, make space for the griever to share recollections and personal anecdotes about the person who passed away. Remember and acknowledge significant dates, such as birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays, to let the survivor know their loved one has not been forgotten.

Provide Social Support

As time passes, continue to involve the grieving person in daily life, but do so without pressure. Understand that they may often decline your invitations. Casually mention activities they used to enjoy and invite them to join you on outings. Most importantly, keep sharing your own life with the bereaved.

Employee Assistance offers confidential in-person, video, or telephone appointments Monday - Friday between 8 am and 5 pm. To schedule an appointment, call (510) 643 7754 or email employeeassistance@berkeley.edu.