

What Can You Do For a Grieving Person?

It can be challenging to support someone who is grieving. Grieving takes time and the needs of the bereaved may change frequently. It is also important that you recognize your own needs and limits during this process: being clear about what you can and can't do will help you sustain your support over the next few months.

Be Present

Often, just having someone near can be a tremendous help. Ask if it would be helpful to have you around, and make it clear that you do not need to be entertained. If you cannot be physically present, calls and notes will convey your support.

Provide Practical Assistance

Offer to make calls, or to screen phone calls and take messages. Bring food or extend an invitation to dinner at your home. Offer to help with everyday chores:

- Grocery shopping, laundry and housework
- Taking care of the garden, feeding the pets or washing the car
- Spending time with the children, baby-sitting or act as chauffeur
- Accompanying the person when he or she needs to go out in public

Be a Good Listener

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

Accept the Person's Feelings, Concerns, Actions

Let them know that s/he doesn't have to worry about shocking or embarrassing you, or causing you to withdraw. Tell the person that anything s/he is feeling is acceptable -- that crying is natural and normal, as is anger and guilt and not wanting to talk at all.

Ask the survivor regularly "How are you doing?" or "How are you feeling?" and express your interest in hearing what s/he has to say. Make sure to ask these questions in a safe and private environment.

Be Patient

Keep in mind that it takes months, even years of time for someone who is suffering to accept his or her loss and to deal with the changes it has caused. Be patient with the survivor's changing feelings, moods and availability.

Keep Doors of Communication Open

Telephone, visit, and send cards. But also give him or her permission to say no to your call or visit without feeling that it is risking your friendship.

Remember the Deceased

Join the survivor in the telling of recollections, sharing your own anecdotes as well. Validate the person who died, and talk about how s/he touched and enriched the lives of other people. Acknowledge birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays. Let the survivor know that you haven't forgotten their loved one.

Provide Social Support

In time, give the survivor unpressured opportunities to reenter daily life, understanding that many of your offers will be refused. When the opportunity arises, mention activities the survivor has enjoyed. Invite her or him to accompany you on an outing, but accept and respect a negative response. Continue to share your life with the bereaved.

Offer Reassurance

After the initial shock has passed, you can help him or her recognize that the pain will eventually lessen. You can do this by sharing your feelings and talking about any similar experiences you've had, but without assuming "I know how you feel."

Employee Assistance staff are available to meet with employees or family members who are experiencing difficulties. Call for a free, confidential appointment at 510-643-7754