

How to Help a Grieving Friend

When someone we know has lost a loved one, we often feel helpless. We struggle with what to do or say as well as what not to do or say. We must remember that grief is a normal process, and that the period of mourning may be difficult. Your friend's life has been severely disrupted. It will take time to put his or her life back in order, usually more time than anyone expects. More than anything else, your grieving friend needs for you to be yourself. Sharing your sorrow and communicating your feelings of caring are most helpful. Here are some hints to give you the confidence to be yourself:

1. Do not put off getting in touch.

Telephone and ask when you may visit. The initial visit to your friend will help to overcome your discomfort and open the way for further visits and phone calls.

2. Immediately after the death, your presence is all that is necessary.

A squeeze of the hand or a brief embrace can communicate your feelings. Words such as "I'm sorry," or "I'll miss him, too" are perfectly appropriate.

3. Listen.

Most grieving persons want to talk about the deceased. Encourage your friend to do so. Do not avoid mentioning the name or change the topic of conversation.

4. Treat the mourner as a normal person.

Avoid pity because it can damage self-respect.

5. Accept whatever feelings are expressed by the bereaved.

By allowing your friend to openly express anger, feel depressed or guilty or share other feelings, you are helping him or her through the grieving process.

6. Be patient with your grieving friend.

Mourning takes a long time, and he or she may need your support for many months.

7. Encourage the person to take good care of him or herself.

Grief may cause stress and a general lowering of resistance to illness.

8. Avoid cliches.

Statements such as "I know just how you feel," "Life is for the living," or "It's God's will" are not helpful.

9. Offer to help with practical matters.

Make specific offers of help such as "I'm going to the grocery store, what may I get for you?"


10. Be aware of times when a grieving friend might be especially lonely. Evenings, weekends and holidays are times when a visit or phone call might be very much appreciated.

11. Suggest that your grieving friend join a support group.

A group can help the person through his or her grief by the sharing of feelings and thoughts with others who are bereaved. Support groups offer friendship, suggestions, understanding and hope.

12. Encourage the postponement of major decisions.

Suggest that your friend wait until after the period of intense grief to make important changes in his or her life.

Ways of helping grieving people are limitless. For more information, education concerning grief and loss, and resource materials, please call the Talbot Hospice Foundation Bereavement Coordinator at 410-822-6681. 

BEREAVEMENT SERVICES

Individual & Family Counseling: For anyone in the community who has experienced a loss.

Looking Ahead: A six week education/support group for any adult who has experienced the loss of a loved one. Offered twice a year.

The Next Chapter: A semi-monthly program based on wise and practical suggestions for getting back on your feet after the death of your husband.

Rainbow Days: Programs geared to children and teens whose lives have been changed because of the death of a loved one.

Community Education: Speakers for community groups who wish information on the bereavement process.

A Lending Library of Books, Videos, & Publications: A wide variety of educational and support materials.

Caregivers Support Group: A weekly support group for those who provide care for loved ones in life-limiting situations.

Return to Laughter: A monthly gathering based on the premise that laughter is healing. Participants share jokes, stories, videos and other bits of humor.

Survivors of Suicide: A semi-monthly support group for adults who have lost loved ones to suicide.

Widows and Widowers Wine & Cheese Party: A monthly gathering held in private homes for those who have lost a spouse and just want to "get out" during the weekend.