

5 Tips you CAN do to help the grieving!!!!

Who hasn't heard or said themselves "I just don't know what to say." Or "I feel so helpless – there's nothing I can do!!" Well there ARE things that you can do or say to help those in pain due to the death of a loved one. We can help, and not just in little ways, and it makes a tremendous difference to those we see in pain.

Here are a few points to consider when you are trying to help someone who is grieving:

1. First and very important - talk about the person who has died. It seems that we never want to mention their name. I know it comes from a place of concern and the desire not to upset someone you care about. However, that thinking is misguided and people love to speak the name of the person who has died and talk about them. To not talk about them as if they have never existed is very distressing to the person who is grieving. It may produce tears but it is often more comforting than feeling that the person's name can never be mentioned.
2. Ask people how they feel – I mean REALLY ask. Don't let them get away with "I'm fine". We are so polite in our society that we don't want to burden others with our problems. And ask them many months after the death occurs. In the beginning people are in shock and the pain sometimes takes months and months to really start to hit people. By then the world feels you should be "getting over it"!!! This includes asking not just when you see them at work or at a social function. Pick up the phone. When people are afraid to talk or don't know what to say to someone who is grieving they end up isolating them by not keeping in touch. This is not a contagious disease.
3. It takes an enormous amount of energy to "be strong" or look "normal". Many would win Oscars for their performances, looking and acting as they did before so their friends would not be uncomfortable. In actuality they are trying to discover what their new "normal" is and that takes a considerable amount of time. Just because people look good doesn't mean they feel good. Don't let the façade fool you. People don't need the added pressure to put up a good front for others when they are struggling with all the emotional, physical, cognitive and sometime behavioral effects of grief. They just need someone to acknowledge that this is a difficult time for them.
4. The clichés that people hear such as "getting on with life" and "getting over it" irritate those grieving, as they know that these expressions do not represent the reality of the situation. They will not get over it, but they will learn to live with it or get used to the new world into which they have been plunged. It is not just the absence of the person they loved but also how that person affected their lives and the loss of future plans and possibly dreams. They will never be the same person as they were before and now is the painful time when they have to start determining what their life will look like without that person in it. So continue to love that person as they change and adapt to their new world.

5. I'm sure we have all said to someone at a funeral, "Call if you need anything, I'll be there." Well I bet they didn't call you. The phrase is said with the best of intentions but the grieving will not likely call you. They don't know what they need and trying to decide what that would be would take more energy than they have available. So it would be better if you figure out what your friend needs and just DO IT!! Now that would be appreciated!! If it is an invitation to go somewhere, don't be offended if you are turned down. Keep asking. Everyday is different and by continuing to ask you are staying in touch and connecting with someone who is in pain. Continuing to invite someone will let him or her know you are there for him or her and you care.

The common theme through these tips is you have to let the person who is grieving know that you care, you are trying to understand what life is like for them and you will not abandon them.

People often feel very alone and think they are "going crazy" through this difficult and confusing time. In many aspects of their life they are off balance and having a stable friend to be there regardless of the reception will be very appreciated.

I know we don't want people to cry but sometimes that is what is needed. Hopefully we will learn how to help each other by talking about this more and putting our words into action.

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