

How to Support Someone Who is Grieving?

General Thoughts and Guidelines

Everyone's grief is unique. Even members of the same family experiencing the same loss the same way may express their grief in dramatically different ways. It is important not to judge the way people grieve or express their grief, even though it may make you a little uncomfortable. The thought is not to try and pull or push them through their grief, but to walk along side of them, accompanying them in their journey and at their pace.

Ideas on Supporting Someone who has lost someone they love

- Attend the funeral service and visitation.
- Just be there for the family.
- Let them be alone if that is what they want.
- Recall a positive memory of the person who died and share it with the family.
- Allow the family to talk about the death if they need to.
- Listen to them. Let them talk without interruption, advice or judgment.
- Allow them to cry or not cry.
- Use the name of the person who died. It helps keep their memory alive.
- Share a story about the person who died.
- Accept the various expressions of their grief and that this process will last the rest of their lives. They will never be over it but hopefully they will learn to live with the loss.
- Be aware of things that may be difficult for the griever to experience (love songs, movies with death in them, etc.)

Things Not to Do

- Don't try and change the way they express their grief
- Don't force them into a role, "Be Strong, Don't Cry"
- Don't expect them to be back to their old self in a week or two.
- Don't expect a thank-you card
- Don't send sympathy cards that express rejoicing or joyful sentiments

Additional Resources

How to help a grieving friend, Stephanie Whitson, Navpress 2005

How can I help, June Cerza Kolf, Fisher Books 1999

The art of Condolence, Leonard Zunin, MD and Hilary Zunin, Harper Perennial 1992

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