



The gift of our presence is most important to people in grief.

Six Areas of Special Concern

Adapted from the original by Dr. Bill Webster

These six practical suggestions can help you be a positive voice of support for those who have had a loss.

1. Be there.

Most of us want to help take away the pain of loss. We offer wonderful practical help, bringing in food and looking after children. Yet, often what is also needed is for us to reach out, establish contact and be there for the survivors. The gift of presence is most important to people in grief.

2. Please listen.

One of the healthy things in the days before a funeral is the opportunity for people to talk about the dead person and the events surrounding the death. People need to talk, which means that we need to listen. Simple listening skills such as maintaining eye contact, leaning forward and nodding your head can encourage the griever to open up. The unspoken messages “You’re important and what you are saying is important, and I want to hear everything you’re telling me.”

3. Interpret “normal” behavior.

Grief is an emotional response to a significant loss and manifests itself in many different ways. All emotions are normal. People in grief, not understanding the emotional explosion they may be experiencing, often think they are going crazy. They aren’t! They may need some help to work through all their feelings, but that’s okay. Simply helping people to understand that they are normal in their feelings of grief can be the best medicine.

4. Legitimize grief feelings.

Each loss is unique to the griever, influenced by many factors around the relationship and the circumstances. Grief is confusing to people for many reasons. Support those grieving by assuring them that you don’t mind if they cry, or rant and rave, or show anger, or display any of the common emotions associated with grief. Tell them you are not trying to fix them or indicate they should be doing better.



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5. Tolerate angry responses.

Be prepared for some angry reactions or outbursts. It is not necessarily a reflection on you. Anger doesn't always get focused in the right direction. Don't get angry in return or give up on the person. They are in pain and we cannot give them what they want the most—the return of the person they have lost. Be realistic about the help you can offer. You cannot take their pain away. But you can help—and that starts with being understanding.

6. Give the griever hope.

Without minimizing the pain and difficulty of grief, give the griever hope. Hope that someday the pain will subside. That life will have meaning again. Bring comfort that things will get better, and that they will find the grace and strength to carry on. Support groups can be helpful, showing the possibility of recovery. Give hope and constant reassurance that as long as they work at it with courage, the pain will subside and life will go on.

Always remember that grief takes time. Not everyone goes through the same process, and none at the identical pace. It is up to the grieving person to set the pace for their own journey. Friends and family can walk with them, but we can't fix them, make their decisions for them, or set the pace for their journey. We can walk alongside and let them know they are not alone. We can make a difference in someone's life. ■



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