

What You Can Do to Help Someone Who is Grieving

- **Be a good listener.** Sometimes the best thing you can offer to someone who is grieving is to listen. Assure the person that it is okay to talk about his or her feelings. Although you cannot erase the pain of the bereaved person's loss, you can provide a great deal of comfort by being there to listen.
- **Allow them to talk about how their loved one died.** People who are grieving may need to tell the story over and over again, sometimes in minute detail. Be patient. Repeating the story is a way of processing and accepting the death.
- **Respect the person's way of grieving.** There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Everyone grieves in his or her own way.
- **Offer nonjudgmental support.** Avoid placing judgements on the way your loved one is grieving, the circumstances of the death or the person that died. That is not helpful to the grieving individual and tends to make matters worse.
- **There is no set timetable for grieving.** For many people, it can take 12 to 24 months before they feel significant healing from their loss. For others, the grieving process may be shorter or longer. Avoid pressuring your loved one to move on or make them feel like they have been grieving too long. This can actually slow the healing process.
- **Accept mood swings.** Be aware that a grieving person will have emotional ups and downs. Grief is often described as an emotional roller coaster. Someone who has just lost a loved one may feel fine one moment and overcome with emotion the next. This is a normal part of the grieving process.
- **Avoid giving advice.** It is best to avoid making suggestions about what the bereaved person should or shouldn't do. Such advice is usually well meant, but it may make the bereaved person feel worse. Instead, let the person know that you recognize how great his or her loss is.
- **Refrain from trying to explain the loss.** Words that are meant to console the bereaved can in some cases have the opposite effect. Avoid saying things like, "Your loved one is in a better place," "It is God's will," or "At least she or he is no longer suffering." Simply being there to listen and support them is one of the best things you can do for them.
- **Help out with practical tasks.** A bereaved person may be glad to have help with activities like grocery shopping, preparing meals, making phone calls, doing laundry, babysitting and so on. Rather than saying, "Let me know if there is anything I can do to help," offer assistance with specific tasks you are in a position to help with.
- **Be aware of special dates.** It is common for grief to intensify around special days such as birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays. This is normal. Check in on your loved one around these times to offer support or a listening ear.