

How to Support a Grieving Person¹

Stay Connected

- “Let grieving people know, by your words and actions, that you care, that you will be there for them when they need you”
- “When you stay connected, not going away when someone acts weird or moody, you give the grieving person the gift of real friendship”
- “Right after a big loss, people are often surrounded by supporters. But it’s a few weeks later, when the commotion dies down and people go away, that the grieving really settles in. This is a critical time to reach out to help”

Have Patience

- Grieving people are just not themselves
- Moody and/or strange behavior can make them hard to be around
- “Your patience with them is a gift and expression of true caring.”

Just Be You and Be There

- “it is not your job to fix them, give them great advice, or convince them you know what they are feeling”
- Just be there....even it means not speaking. They may appreciate the silence

Expect Anger

- “grieving people can be so angry that they will sometimes overreact to the littlest thing”
- “if their anger gets pointed at you, don’t be surprised”...”Support in this case means not being angry back”

Just Ask

- “one way to be sure you are meeting their needs in the best way is to ask them what kind of support they would like from you”

Grow Huge Ears

- “people experiencing a big loss need to talk...they need to say the same things over and over and over again”

Remember Anniversaries

- Remembering anniversaries helps remind them “that time is passing and they are getting through the hard times”
- “reminders also let them know that you care enough to pay attention to their life and that you are interested in how they are doing.

Help them See the Upside

- Down the road after the loss, “when they appear to be putting themselves back together, your help in remembering the good stuff of life and how they are amazing, awesome, playful, cool, competent, and lovable can be very helpful”

Skills for the Hard Times²

¹ *Help for the Hard Times: Getting Through Loss* by Earl Hipp

Don't "Do" Anything

- “change is why you are emotionally confused in the first place. Don't' add to the burden by creating more”

Remember, Grief is Normal and Healthy

- “Grieving, even feeling miserable, is normal, necessary, and a natural part of the healing process”

Don't Try to Keep it All Together

- “to a degree, it is necessary to “come apart” when you've had a big loss”

If You Need Help, Get It

- “if you are drowning in your feelings of grief, ask for a life preserver”

Be Yourself No Matter What

- “because everyone is different, there is no normal way to grieve”
- “don't feel guilty or self-conscious about any feelings”

Cry If You Can

- “crying releases pent-up emotional pressure:
- “often helps when you can't find the words you need, or words can't fully convey what you're feeling

Take Care of Your Body

- Take naps; go to bed early
- Work out regularly (according your typical schedule)
- Eat healthy good
- Go easy on caffeine
- Drink lots of water

Keep It Simple

- “with all of the confusion inside, you'll want to keep a simple and restful schedule”
- “try not to take on any new responsibilities or activities or complicate your life unnecessarily”

Let Time Pass

- “It can take months or longer for things to settle down”
- “Grief is not something we “do” or have control over”

Be With Caring People

² Help for the Hard Times: Getting Through Loss by Earl Hipp

- You may be okay on the outside, but hurting on the inside
- “allowing others to support you can ease the pain and help you to get through it all”

Talk, Talk, Talk

- “You will be considering and reconsidering questions about your loss”
- Since you will be repetitive in your talk, it is good to have a variety of people to talk to.
- “you need to talk and you are worth listening to”

Get A Guide

- “you can get a special kind of support from people who have had a similar loss”

Ask for Support

- Ask people “for their patience and understanding, for regular affirmations, for an occasional hug”

Take Some Time Alone

- “Solitude means taking time away for rest and peace of mind. Time to think, cry, do nothing, be quiet, pray, meditate, draw,”etc.
- “There is an important difference between solitude and isolation. Solitude is taking time out; isolation is going away:

Lean on your Spirituality

- “With big changes we always ask the enormous question of “WHY?”
- Your faith can help you answer the “why”
- “Your faith can help you to let go of the details, release your confused and tired mind”

Seven Things a Grieving Person Needs to Know³

1. You are lovable even when you are a confused mess

- “your unhappiness is an expression of your humanness”
- “you may be down but you are still a competent, lovable person deserving of others’ care and respect, not to mention being nice to yourself”

2. Crying is a gift

- “way of expressing basic human emotion”
- “it is how you know your Loss was important”
- “help you relieve pent-up emotional pressure in a healthy way”
- “It’s okay to cry until the need to cry goes away by itself”

3. Almost every thought, feeling, and behavior is normal

- “with big and not-so-big losses, people’s lives can get pretty scrambled up. That is why it is common for people to be, think, or feel weird at times”
- “being depressed, quick to anger, weird in your humor, or wildly happy at odd times are all fairly common for grieving people”

³ *Help for the Hard Times: Getting Through Loss* by Earl Hipp

- “as long as your behavior is not illegal or self-destructive....you are probably pretty normal:
- 4. You are no alone**
 - “for whatever comfort it may provide, people have been grieving their hearts out since the beginning of time, and surviving”
 - “you are not alone; people understand; you will get through it”
 - 5. People are uncomfortable with grieving people**
 - “because most people don’t know much about the grief process, it’s hard for them to know how to be helpful”
 - Witnessing another grieving person may stir up loss
 - “it is not helpful to blame someone who won’t, can’t, or doesn’t know how to be there for you”
 - “if people are uncomfortable with your grief, it’s their problem”
 - 6. No matter how bad you feel, you will survive**
 - Grief is part of being human
 - “you can carry your wound through your life or you can help it to heal cleanly.
 - 7. It takes as long as it takes**
 - Nothing can speed up the healing of grief
 - “the wound from your loss will heal naturally and in its own time. Your job is to take great care of yourself in the meantime”

What to Do For Grieving Youth⁴

1. Arrange for a professional counselor to meet with the youth. This individual should be well versed in the dynamics of grief.
2. Remember your presence is most important. Don’t pretend to have all the answers. Consider sharing your own personal experience of loss and grief.
3. Allow the youth as much time as needed to express his or her thoughts. Be comfortable in silence.
4. Share with the youth that there is no right or wrong way to grieve, no set pattern of behavior, that he or she only needs to be in touch with his or her feelings and be able to share those feelings, having them accepted, by someone they trust.
5. Give the youth permission to cry.
6. Never force a youth to communicate feelings if he or she is reluctant to do so. The youth should be free to feel his or her sorrow in his or her own time and way. (The youth’s needs are what are important, not yours.)

Guidelines for Healing Grief

1. Accept the grief. Roll with the tides of it. Do not try to be brave. Give permission to cry.
2. Talk about it. Share your grief within the family. Do not attempt to protect them by silence period. Find a friend to talk to, someone who will listen without passing judgment.
3. Keep busy. Do purposeful work that occupies the mind, but avoid frantic activity.
4. Take care of yourself. Bereavement can be a threat to your health. At the moment, you may feel that you don’t care. That will change. You are important; your life is valuable—care for it.

⁴ Roman Catholic Diocese of Charlotte Youth Ministry Handbook B-23

5. Eat well. At this time of emotional and physical depletion, your body needs good nourishment more than ever.
6. Exercise regularly. Return to your old program or start one as soon as possible. Depression can be lightened by the biochemical changes brought on by exercise, and you will sleep better.
7. Get rid of imagined guilt. Only hindsight is 20/20. You did the best you could do at the time, all things considered. We all make mistakes, we are all imperfect. If you are convinced you have real guilt, consider professional or spiritual counseling. God is willing to forgive you, forgive yourself.
8. Accept your understanding of the death. For the time being, you have probably asked "Why?" over and over with no acceptable answer. You probably have some degree of understanding, even if its minimal. Use that as your viewpoint until you are able to work up to another level of understanding.
9. Join a group of others who are sorrowing. Your old circle of friends may change. Even if it does not, you will need new friends who have been through a similar experience. Bereaved people often form groups for support, sharing, and friendship.
10. Associate with old friends. This may be difficult. Some will be embarrassed by your presence, but they will get over it if and when you can talk and act naturally, without avoiding the subject of your loss.

Reactions of Troubled Kids⁵

- "no two kids respond to trauma in exactly the same way. Here are some of the most typical reactions to stress"

Emotional and Cognitive Reactions:

- Feeling hopeless about the future
- Feeling detached from others, numb
- Having difficulty concentrating
- Feeling jumpy
- Having upsetting dreams
- Feeling nervous, scared, or sad
- Avoiding things that are reminders of what happened
- Being irritable or easily angered
- Feeling agitated or easily upset

Physical Reactions:

- Stomach problems, changes in appetite, or overeating
- Trouble sleeping
- Fatigue
- Racing heart or rapid breathing
- Headaches
- Failure to take care of oneself

Spiritual Reactions:

- Anger at God

⁵ *In the Aftermath: Processing Trauma through the Lens of Lament* by Kara Powell & Brad Griffin; Journal of Student Ministries May/June 2006

- Questioning God's goodness
- Difficulty finding meaning in life's events
- Difficulty trusting

3Rs of Responding Wisely

Reassurance: their feelings are normal for people who have experienced these events; tell them that we're proud that they shared their feelings; their feelings will grow less intense over time.

Retelling: one of the most healing experiences is to retell the events or stories about the deceased; they may share bits and pieces until they are ready to more fully open up

Resources: we can provide counseling if needed; some great resources are allowing kids to have fun again; helping young people get back into a routine

Some Needs of a Child Experiencing the Death of a Loved One

Honesty:

- give as much information as the teen can absorb and understand
- answer questions as they are asked
- all the teen to see that the parent is experiencing some emotional distress (if this applies)

Love:

- a teen needs a constant assurance of love
- a teens needs to be assured that he/she is lovable

Expressions of Emotion

- a teen needs to know it's okay to have feelings of anger, fear, loneliness, etc
- a teen needs to learn how to deal with feelings
- a teens needs to talk about changing feelings
- a teens help to say the words, "*My friend died*"

Security:

- a teen needs to do as much as possible on a regular schedule
- a teen needs to know that there are some facets of life that have not been changed by the death

Discipline:

- a teen needs to maintain, as much as possible, normal disciplinary standards of the home

Time:

- a teen needs time to adjust to the concept of death
- a teen needs time to express emotions

Teens and Grief

Teens need to understand and express the reality of death.

Teens need permission to grieve; and they need to have a physically, emotionally nurturing environment to do it in, as well as a spiritually secure one.

Teens need to remember

Teens need to develop new self-identity without the person who died

Teens need to be able to question life and its meaning

Teens need the continued presence of a stable, supportive adult