

How To Converse With Grieving People

Friends, relatives, and neighbors are usually supportive at the time of a death and during the wake and funeral that follows. Food, flowers, and physical presence are among the thoughtful expressions. But after the funeral, many grieving people wonder where their friends are. In some ways they need support and caring from their friends even more when the reality hits and the long process of grief begins. Ways of helping grieving people are as limitless as your imagination.

Some suggestions are:

- Try to understand the grief process rather than be annoyed by it.
- "I'm sorry" or "I care" is all that is necessary to say; a squeeze of the hand, a hug, a kiss can say the words.
- Don't say: "You will get over it in time." They will never stop missing the person who died. Time may soften the hurt, but it will not just go away. There will always be a scar.
- Listen, listen, listen. Talking about the pain slowly lessens its sting. Most bereaved persons need to talk. It is helpful for someone to listen. Try to become an effective listener.
- Don't tell people: "It's God's will." Explanations do not console.
- Encourage expressions of specific feelings: anger, guilt, frustration, confusion, depression, hate.
- Be patient. Mourning takes time. People need you. Stand by them for as long as possible. There is no timetable for grief. Do not give a pep talk or suggest a timetable.
- Talk about the good memories. They help the healing process.
- Suggest that grieving people take part in support groups. Sharing similar experiences helps healing.
- Be there caring, saying "I'm sorry" and helping in practical ways.
- Sincerely ask, "How are you doing?" Bereaved persons can tell if you want to hear "fine" or if you really want to know.
- Help bereaved to eliminate expectations as to how they should feel and when they will be healed.
- Be approachable, aware, and interested.
- Be accepting of the person, of his/her feelings, his/her confusion.
- Acts of thoughtfulness—a note, visit, plant, helpful book, plate of cookies, phone call, invitation to lunch or to go shopping, coffee.
- **Be confidential** with what is shared with you, *unless they talk of suicide or potential violence.*