

Good Grief

How to Help Someone Who is Grieving

Many people truly want to help a friend or family member who is experiencing a severe loss. Words often fail us at time like these, leaving us stammering for the right thing to say. Some people are so afraid to say or do the wrong thing, they choose to do nothing at all. Doing nothing at all is certainly an option, but it's not often a good one. While there is no one perfect way to respond or to support someone you care about, here are some good "rules" as you seek to be present and focused on the needs of the one who is grieving.

1. **Grief belongs to the griever** – You have a supporting role, not the central role, in your loved one's grief. Grief is a very personal experience. Follow the lead of the one who is grieving, and what they need from you.
2. **Stay present and state the truth** – It's tempting to make statements about the past or the future when the present holds so much pain and is uncomfortable. Stick with the truth: This hurts. I love you. I'm here.
3. **Don't try to fix the unfixable** – Loss cannot be fixed or repaired or solved. Pain is something we tend to, not fix.
4. **Be willing to witness searing, unbearable pain.** – If you're not able to be with people in their deepest pain, then do what you are capable of and no more.
5. **This is not about you** – Don't take someone's grief or response to grief personally. Please find your own people to lean on at this time – it's important that you be supported while you support your friend.
6. **Anticipate, don't ask** – Do not say, "Call me if you need anything," because your friend will not call. In the midst of grief, we do not have the capacity to know what we need or the energy to ask for it. Instead make concrete offers to help: "I will come by at 5:00pm on Tuesday to take your trash to the curb," or "I will stop by each morning on the way to work to take the dog for a walk."
7. **Do the reoccurring things** – Similar to number #6, look for ways to lessen the burden of "normal" life requirements. Support your friend in small, ordinary ways of tangible evidence of love. Mow the lawn, grocery shop, refill prescriptions, bring in the mail, etc.
8. **Run interference** – Loss often brings an influx of people who want to help and support. There might be ways you can shield and shelter your friend by setting yourself up as the designated point person – the one who relays information to the outside world, or organizes well-wishers.
9. **Love** – Above all, show your love. Show up. Say something, Do something. Be willing to stand beside your loved one without judgment or selfish desires. Listen. Be there. Be present. Be a friend. Be love!