
What We Need During Grief

Time: Time alone, and time with others whom you trust and who will listen when you need to talk. You may need months and, sometimes, years of time to feel and understand the feelings that go along with loss.

Caring: Try to allow yourself to accept the expressions of caring from others even though they may be uneasy or awkward. Helping a friend or relative who has suffered a loss may bring a feeling of closeness with that person.

Security: Try to reduce or find help with financial or other stresses in your life. Allow yourself to be close to those you trust. Getting back into a routine helps. Do things at your own pace.

Permission to backslide: Sometimes after a period of feeling good, we find ourselves back in the old feelings of extreme sadness, despair, or anger. This is the nature of grief, up and down, and it may happen over and over for a time. It happens because, as humans, we cannot take in all of the pain and the meaning of death at once. So we let it in a little at a time.

Rest, relaxation, exercise, nourishment, diversion: You may need extra amounts of things you needed before. Hot baths, afternoon naps, a trip, a project or "cause" to work for to help others – any of these may give you a lift. Grief is an emotionally and physically exhausting process. You need to replenish yourself. Follow what feels healing to you and what connects you to the people you love.

Hope: You may find hope and comfort from those who have experienced a similar loss. Knowing what helped them, realizing they have recovered, and understanding that time *does* help, may give you hope that sometime in the future your grief will be less raw and painful.

Small pleasures: Do not underestimate the healing effects of small pleasures. Sunsets, a walk in the woods, a favorite food – all are small steps toward regaining your pleasure in life itself.

Goals: For awhile, it will seem that much of life is without meaning. At times like these, small goals are helpful. Something to look forward to, like playing tennis with a friend next week, a movie tomorrow night, or a trip next month can help you get through the immediate future. Living one day at a time is a rule of thumb. At first, don't be surprised if your enjoyment of these things isn't the same – this is normal. As time passes, you may want to work on longer range goals to give some structure and direction to your life; guidance or counseling can also be helpful.

What to Say and What Not to Say...
 Ministry Home Care
 Hospice Services, Marshfield

What to say to comfort someone in their grief:	What NOT to say when comforting someone in their grief:
• I'm sorry.	• I understand how you feel.
• I'm sad for you.	• Death was a blessing.
• How are you doing with this?	• It was God's will.
• I don't know why it happened.	• It all happened for the best.
• What can I do for you?	• You're still young.
• I'm here and I want to listen.	• You have your whole life ahead of you.
• Please tell me what you are feeling.	• You'll feel worse before you feel better.
• This must be hard for you.	• You can always remarry.
• What's the hardest part for you?	• Something good will come out of this.
• I'll call you tomorrow.	• Call me when I can help.
• You must really be hurting.	• At least you have another child.
• It isn't fair, is it?	• He/she led a full life.
• You must really feel angry.	• It's time to put it behind you now.
• Take all the time you need.	• Be strong!
• Thank you for sharing your feelings.	• You can have other children.

Frequently Asked Questions:**1. How long does the mourning process last?**

There is neither a *correct* way to mourn nor a *correct* amount of time to mourn. Grief is individual, and a person's need for support, encouragement, and help depend on many factors, including their relationship with the deceased, their coping mechanisms, and their social resources in terms of family and friends.

2. What is the best thing to say to a friend whose family member just died?

Just remember the grieving person is not looking to you to solve their problems or intellectualize about what has happened. The person needs someone who can listen, be comfortable with their tears; and can help handle some task-oriented activities for them such as making phone calls. Tell them you will be there if they want to talk, but they don't have to. If they are comfortable with hugs, hug them. Say "I'm so sorry you are going through this. Just know I care and I'm here."

3. How do I know if my friend is experiencing a normal level of grief or if she needs help dealing with a deeper depression?

If your friend is preoccupied with blaming herself for the death and can't get beyond feeling guilty about everything; if she is feeling hopeless and helpless and cannot find joy in anything, she should be seen by a professional for an evaluation of these symptoms. You can offer to go with her to ensure she gets to the appointment.

4. Am I a bad person to feel a sense of relief that my husband died and no longer has to deal with the painful cancer that slowly killed him?

It is perfectly normal to feel relief mixed with grief and sadness when a loved one dies. Being able to let someone go when they are in such distress is a sign of love and not something to feel guilty about.

Adapted from Final Gifts: Understanding the Special Awareness, Needs and Communications of the Dying, 1993

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