

# How can I help?



Journey of Hearts  
A Healing Place in CyberSpace™

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We all know people around us who are grieving. Sometime we will be impacted also by the loss, other times the loss will be felt by the grieving person alone. The grief process is unique and each person gets through it in their own accord and at their own pace. What is important is that people in the grief and loss phases, often may not be thinking clearly, their grief so overwhelming that they may want to do harm to themselves. That is why it is important to recognize the signs and symptoms of depression, and also suicide warnings. The presence of a friend, a family member, a clergy member or physician who takes the time to notice and to help, may make all the difference between a prolonged grief phase, or one that may have devastating consequences for the person grieving.

Some helpful suggestions in answer to the question "How can I help someone who is grieving?"

- Be in touch - whether on the phone, with a card or a letter or stopping by to say "hi."
  - Let the person grieving know that you are thinking about them.
- Help with the routine matters. It helps remove the burden of the day-to-day maintenance needs which can contribute to stress in the grieving person.
  - See if there is anything that you can do to help. It might be simply going to the store to get groceries, helping fix meals, take care of the children, answer phones.
  - Answering the phone may be particularly helpful if the person is dealing with a sudden loss, e.g. accidental or unexpected death.
- It's all right for the helper to be silent.
  - Often the person grieving just needs "to be," and may not be listening to what you are saying, but your presence can be comfort enough.
  - A hug, a simple touch on the shoulder or hand, a smile and nod, may be all the contact that is needed, the ability to communicate much with few

words.

- It's all right for the grieving person to be silent.
  - All the person grieving to take the lead, they may just want someone around, so as to feel less alone, but not able to engage in conversations.
- Be genuine, be yourself. Be available
  - A simple "I'm Sorry" may be better than trying to find elaborate words of condolence.
- Share things that have worked for you when you have been grieving.
  - If you have found poems, quotes, phrases, cards helpful pass them along. There are certain sympathy cards that I have found to be most soothing, so I have sent one or two cards several times.
  - I will also share several of the poems that I have placed on this website, namely Guardian Angel, In Memory of You and, The Messenger.
  - What works with different people is highly variable, but the thought will be appreciated.
- Write a letter or brief note with a sympathy card
  - Often a few genuine thought of condolence or hopes may help more than the pre formed sympathy card.
  - I have kept many old cards and letters and re-read them over the years. I found a card sent to me during a time of struggle several years before when I was facing another time of struggle. It had been sent to me by a girlfriend, who has since died. Those words written many years ago, still helped me, as though she was still with me.
- Keep in touch
  - Be available. Don't think that the grieving process ends within the first week, or month. Depending on the loss, the grieving can last for several years.
  - Family and close friends may be available during the initial phases, but later on may be less available, that's when the calls and visits will be most appreciated.
- Remember to listen, Try to avoid chatting
  - Idle chit-chat will probably be more annoying than distracting for a grieving person.
  - Small talk can help, up to a point, but it is a very fine line, take care not to cross it.

- What the person needs probably more than anything, is someone to listen, to listen to their stories, their remembrances as they work through the transition phase.
- Be able to deal with someone crying, or someone's anger
  - This is often the what I am able to give to grieving families, the ability to let someone break down and cry, to "be there" with them in the tears. Tears are very healing.
  - Anger can be a difficult emotion to deal with, but frequently gets evoked during a grieving process. It is an emotion that is difficult for people to deal with, but one of the stages of grief.
- Share your own experiences if appropriate, but try to avoid telling them "I know just what you are feeling," because odds are you don't know exactly how they are feeling.
  - What may be helpful is to ask someone how or what they are feeling. A grieving person may be glad to be able to express the anger that they are feeling at the person, the situation.
- Take your cues from the grieving person, let them give you the details only if they want to share. Much depends on the circumstances of the loss.
  - Some people may find reliving the details too traumatic.
  - Others can find healing in sharing the details.
- Encourage postponing any major decisions, if at all possible.
- Remember that Anniversaries, Birthdays and special holidays may be difficult for the person still grieving.
  - These times may trigger the grief response anew. Understanding this helps in dealing with the process.
- Allow the grief process to proceed.
  - There are many behaviors that may seem morbid to the non-griever or rituals that are created to remember the person lost, the relationship lost, the job lost.
  - Often these rituals help a person incorporate the loss, move throughout the grief phase, incorporate and finally be able to move on and let go.
- Remember that pity is destructive, not constructive. It undermines self-esteem, and self-respect.
  - Acknowledge that they have experienced a loss, see if they want to share, and then move on.

- Don't dwell on the past loss.
  
- Encourage the person grieving their loss to reenter the "real world"
  - The activities may be simple, like attending a play, getting a massage, going to the movie.
  
- Helping a person through a grieving process can be very rewarding. It may even save a life.
  - I have found one of the most rewarding experienced has been that of helping patients, family and friends through the grieving process.
  - Helping someone through this process may require more time, more caring and more energy than you had originally thought possible. It often will require giving more of who you are as a person, the ability to just be.

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