

10 Ways to Help a Grieving Friend

By Alex Guidotti

As a Provisional Psychologist who works with grief, I often get asked: "how can I help a friend or family member who is grieving?"

Here are 10 ways to help a grieving friend or family member:

1. Don't assume you know what they need - ask them!

Don't be afraid to ask your loved one what they need. They may need a hug, someone to talk to, or maybe some help around the house.

2. Listen, Listen, Listen.

People who are grieving just want to be heard. They don't need advice - they just want someone to listen.

3. Allow your friend to share their special memories - over and over again.

Part of the grieving process is sharing memories of their loved one. Let them show you photographs, mementos, or other things they might find significant.

4. Give them some space - but don't forget to check in on them.

We tend to believe that a grieving person needs lots of space or alone time. The need for space can come and go. Give them some space, but don't forget to check in on them with a text, call or email that doesn't require them to do anything. They'll appreciate knowing someone is there for them.

5. Check in with them after the funeral (even months or years after).

We tend to check in with the person who is grieving - during or immediately after the funeral. Then our busy lives take hold and we forget that their life is forever altered long after the funeral. So, checking in with them a few weeks, months, or years after the death can be meaningful to your friend or family member.

6. Don't take offence if they refuse to go to a planned activity and never pressure them to attend an engagement.

Because grief is so physically and emotionally exhausting, people who are grieving may find it difficult to attend parties, social gatherings, etc. Allow them the option to say no or leave early if they do attend. If they do say no, ask them to attend another time. A grieving person's 'no' may mean 'not right now - but maybe another time'.

7. Say 'something' - but not 'anything'.

Avoiding saying 'I know how you feel. When my ____ died...'. Although our intentions are pure, we will never know how that person feels. We all grieve differently. One thing a person could say is "I have no idea how you feel, but I'm here if you need me..."

8. Help out with meal preparation, cleaning, and odd jobs.

People who are grieving sometimes forget to eat (!), clean the house, or maintain their personal hygiene. You can help a grieving person by making frozen dinners to pop in the microwave when they're hungry, help tidy their house or suggest they take time for their self-care while you help with household chores.

9. Refrain from being judgemental.

There are various ways that people die. That last thing a person who is grieving needs is to be judged *how* a person died. Check your judgements at the door and be compassionate, caring, and respectful to the person grieving.

10. Don't be afraid to suggest counselling if your friend is struggling

Sometimes people who are grieving can get 'stuck' and may need additional help. If you find your friend or family member is struggling, having thoughts of self harm, or have been grieving for an extended period of time, don't be afraid to suggest additional help. There are many tools & strategies available as well as counsellors trained to help someone who is grieving.

Please feel free to contact myself or one of our staff for additional resources