

How to Help Grieving People
Hospice of Southeastern Connecticut Bereavement Program
taken from Understanding, Coping and Growing Through Grief
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Relatives, friends and neighbors are supportive at the time of a death, during the wake and funeral. Food, flowers and their presence are among the many thoughtful expressions. After the funeral, many grieving people wonder what happened to their friends. They need their support and caring even more when the reality begins to hit and the long process of grief begins: Their help is essential, since immediate family members have their hands full of grief and may find it difficult to give support to one another, or may not live nearby. Your help and understanding can make a significant difference in the healing of your friend's grief. Unresolved grief can lead to physical or mental illness, suicide or premature death. A grieving person needs friends who are willing to: LISTEN; cry with them; sit with them; reminisce; care; have creative ideas for coping; be honest; help them feel loved and needed; believe that they will make it through their grief. Ways of helping grieving people are a limitless as your imagination.

1. All that is necessary is a squeeze of the hand, a kiss, a hug, your presence. If you want to say something, say, "I'm sorry" or "I care".
2. Offer to help with practical matters; i.e., errands, fixing food, caring for children. Say "I'm going to the store. Do you need bread, milk, etc.? I'll get them." It is not helpful to say, "Call me if there is anything I can do."
3. Don't be afraid to cry openly if you were close to the deceased. Often the bereaved find themselves comforting you, but at the same time they understand your tears and don't feel so alone in their grief.
4. It is not necessary to ask questions about how the death happened. Let the bereaved tell you as much as they want when they are ready. A helpful question might be, "Would you like to talk? I'll listen."
5. Don't say, "I know just how you feel."

6. The bereaved may ask "WHY?" It is often a cry of pain rather than a question. It is not necessary to answer, but if you do, you may reply "I don't know why."
7. Don't use platitudes like "Life is for the living," or "It's God's will." Explanations rarely console. It is better to say nothing.
8. Don't avoid the bereaved. This adds to their loss. As the widowed often say, "I not only lost my spouse, by my friend as well."
9. Be aware that weekends, holidays and evenings may be more difficult.
10. Consider sending a note at the time of their loved one's birthday, anniversary, death, or other special day.
11. Practice continuing acts of thoughtfulness—a note, visit, plant, helpful boo on grief, plate of cookies, phone call, invitation for lunch, dinner, coffee. Take the initiative in calling the bereaved.