

## **Helpful Responses to a Grieving Friend** **Adapted from Jensen, 1980**

Caring is natural and helping simple.

1. Get in Touch and Keep in Touch

Make a brief call or write a note. Ask when you may visit. Offer specific help to help with transportation, cooking, lunch on Friday, billeting overflow guests, child care, an outing.

Initially, close friends and family provide support, but eventually a call or visit is welcome. Grieving people sometimes find themselves isolate either because people are uncomfortable visiting or fear to intrude.

2. Say Little, Listen A Lot

At first simple caring gestures and a few words can express your desire to support. Later, your listening ear may be very important. Accept whatever feelings are expressed without defending, arguing or attempting to pacify. Don't give advice, distract or quiz for details. Allow silence. Your presence will provide comfort.

3. Acknowledge and Respond to the Children in the Family

Children fear abandonment and have question of their own which may be unspoken such as, "Was I responsible?" "Will it happen to me?" "Who will take care of me?" "What happened?" (Grollman, 1967). Younger children may have questions that adults find repulsive, like "What is happening to the body right now?" Children will have less anxiety if they are included in decision-making and are given answers to their questions. Vague, ambiguous answers can cause confusion and fear, i.e. "gone" or "sleeping". Children need affection and security.

4. Offer Practical Help

It's not useful to say "Let me know if I can be of help", or "Call me anytime". Be specific. "What would be helpful right now?" "May I drive, (cook, babysit, telephone you Monday and Thursday evening), etc?"

5. Encourage Others to Visit

When the funeral is over and relatives have departed, the bereaved may feel isolated. Well-meaning friends sometimes hesitate to call or visit for fear of intruding or because they feel uncomfortable. You may check to see if visits would be welcome and encourage friends to visit.

6. Write a Letter Expressing Your Love/Memories

A personal note is often treasured while a sympathy card is merely filed. Bereaved people often comment that friends say the name of the deceased—"It's as though he never lived." A personal remembrance is like balm to the spirit.

7. Gently Encourage the Bereaved to Participate in Activities

Going place and doing things alone may be a new experience. Bereaved people feel vulnerable—fear their feeling may erupt unexpectedly may have lost their “couple” identity, may feel like “fifth wheels”. Don’t push but offer invitations. Don’t act hurt if refused. Remain open.

Helping means more than following rules. Who you really are, and what you really intend, will come through. You can afford to make a mistake if your really care, and you can be forgiven. You and your friend will be mutually enriched.