

Bereaved Families of Cape Breton

Do You Want a Gummy Bear? (A Teen Reflects on What Helped After Her Father Died)

By Maykayla Hamilton

When I was 14, my father died in the blink of an eye. In five minutes, I went from being a normal girl with a normal life to one suffering from depression. As a teenager, my sense of self had become extremely fragile. I needed support!

Soon after my dad died, I saw my best friend. My uncle and I were picking her up to take her to the hospital with us. As I walked in, she looked at me and said "Do you want a gummy bear?" I will never forget that moment. A gummy bear? That seems almost funny, but I knew what she meant; she was saying that she wanted to help in some way. I really didn't need a gummy bear, but I certainly knew I needed my best friend's support, no matter how she tried to express it.

While my friend's gummy bear offer was funny – and appreciated -- it is a good idea, I believe, to give some thought to what you say in circumstances like this. Here are a few examples of words and actions that helped me -- and some that did not.

What Helped Me

- I loved it when my family and friends told me stories about good times with my dad.
- When I was really upset and my friends would talk to me, sometimes they would crack a joke at the end of the conversation. It made me laugh and showed me it was okay to open up to them.
- I really enjoyed it when people would ask about my dad. I loved talking about him.
- While I don't like people to see me cry, when I did, it made me feel more comfortable.
- When my friends took me out to a school football game, I thought I would hate it. But actually, I had a lot of fun. It helped to get my mind off my dad's death for a little while.

What Did Not Help Me

- When people avoided me, I knew it was because they didn't know what to say. But it only made me feel more alone.
- I hated it when people told me they knew how I felt, even if they had been in a situation like mine. They couldn't know how I felt.
- I didn't like people telling me how I should be coping.
- It made me uncomfortable when friends treated me differently than they did before my loss. That seemed so unfair, and it made it hard for me to get back to normal.
- Some people acted like I was taking too long to grieve because they expected me to move past my painful loss before I could. This made me feel like I was doing something wrong and I had no way to fix it. I believe that everyone experiences grief differently.

I am no expert on grief, but I hope my experience may help other young people, their parents and friends to provide support to other teens suffering from wrenching grief. The important thing to remember is that your teen needs love and support! I hope this helps in your own situation.

The author is 16 years of age.

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