

## ***Helping Hand Grief Support Group***

### ***How Can I Help a Grieving Friend or Family Member?***

**W**hen there is a death of a loved one, the immediate family will experience a depth and range of emotions and feelings. Often other family members and especially friends feel helpless and confused on how to honor and respect the needs of the grieving. If you have never suffered the severe loss of a loved one your ability to understand those feelings, emotions, and needs may be further complicated. The following guidelines can help you understand those who are grieving and how you can be supportive and comforting.

- Usually the first thing experienced by those in grief is numbness and shock. Some may be crying, yelling or sobbing. Others may be confused and unable to make even simple decisions or choices. Yet others may retreat away from family and friends and isolate themselves. Grief is an individual journey and no two people will have the same feelings and emotions, even within the same family.
  - Please do not attempt to tell a person in grief that “you know how they feel”, since frankly, you don’t and never will.
  - Please do not think that you should be saying just the right words that will explain the “Why” behind the death of their loved one. Telling a grieving person that their loved one is in a better place, that God took their loved one, that God needed another angel, that your love one wouldn’t want you to cry, or similar statements are not comforting to the bereaved.
- Telling the bereaved that you don’t know how they feel, but that you will sit with them as long as they need you, will be far more comforting.
- Often we have found that just a gentle touch and nothing said has a greater impact.
- Surround them with sincere love and understanding, and offer no judgmental statements about the grieving person or their deceased love one.
- If they ask you a question, respond honestly.
- Let them talk as much as they need. Often the bereaved are not seeking for you to “fix the problem”, they just need to say aloud what is inside of them. Please remember that some people need to repeat the story over and over again since the repetition makes what has happened more real to them.
- Please respect their need for private time. The bereaved need time to process the events, which have occurred. Please don’t smother or hover over them.
- The bereaved will become tired easily, since normal sleep patterns are usually disrupted.
- Please understand that the bereaved need and want your comfort and help. Often they don’t know how to ask, or they feel they will be a burden in seeking help. Be assertive; ask them what you can do to help them.

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- Tell them you are going to the food store, what do they need.
- Offer to make phone calls for them, or to keep a list of the received phone calls, visitors, or people who have brought cards and food.
- Help with errands, pick up prescriptions, offer to drive them to any appointments, or go to the cleaners for them.
- Encourage the bereaved to make or keep any medical appointments needed.
- The grief journey takes as long as it takes for the grieving individual. Please don't attempt to move or force them along in that journey. Most people suffering a severe loss find that it will take many months or years for them to become reconciled to the death and to establish their new normal.
- The bereaved will continue to have mood swings. Often just a smell, a song being played, the mention of the loved one's name will cause the grieving person to have an emotional reaction. This is very normal; however, you as their friend may feel that you have caused them further pain.
  - Real pain for the grieving person comes when those around them stop mentioning the name of their loved one. For them it is like the person never existed, that their loved one has been forgotten.
  - Memories are what we are left with after a death.
    - Memories are a gift from God that death cannot destroy.
    - Simply stated, the grief journey is a process; one of having the person in a physical presence to one of loving memories. Help them keep those memories.
    - Allow them to share stories or express feeling about their loved one.
    - Allow them to talk about those special qualities of their loved one.
    - Share with them some of your memories of the deceased person.
    - Remember that funny stories and laughter are a part of the healing process.
    - Maybe you can write down precious memories of their loved one that they could have for some future date and time.
- Dealing with the possessions of the deceased is a very emotional event.
  - Some things must be dealt with immediately, due to legal or estate purposes.
  - Other items, such as clothing, personal belongings do not have to be dealt with until the bereave feels able. This may be many months later before they feel strong enough to sort through those items. No, keeping those items does not complicate their grief, nor is it a creation of a shrine.

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- Finally, encourage the bereaved to seek a grief support group. Maybe you could even come with them for the moral support they may need.

*On behalf of all of us involved in the Helping Hand Grief Support Group we want to thank you. The mere fact that you are seeking this advice places you in the category of a special and loving friend. Always pray for God's wisdom before meeting with the bereaved. And always pray for those who are on the grief journey.*

*George K. Stein, Founder HHGS*