

SUPPORTING A GRIEVING FRIEND

Voices of Youth

A friend has experienced the death of a loved one.
You want to help, but aren't sure how.

A resource on grief for youth by youth

HERE ARE THOUGHTS AND IDEAS FROM BEREAVED YOUTH ON WHAT HELPS AND WHAT DOESN'T

The best words of advice that I can suggest is to offer a good listening ear. Even if you think that you do not have the right words to say or you are afraid they might come out the wrong way, just saying a simple "*It is okay if you feel that way*" can mean a lot more than if you try to give out advice without having experienced the situation yourself. By simply listening to the person who needs to talk about their feelings, it can allow them to feel more secure. – **Jonathan, 23**

I found it really helpful when my friends would come over and just be with me after my dad died. It reminded me that I wasn't alone. – **Will, 15**

Allow your friend to express how he/she feels about the death or the person who died. It is so important that they feel like it is okay to talk about it. Also, if they start crying do not freak out; this is normal. On the other hand, let them have fun. Children often feel very sad one minute and then just want to act as silly as their friends the next. Most importantly, validate their feelings and never tell them that what they feel is wrong. – **Sarah, 19**

It is hard to know what to do but I think the wrong thing to do is nothing at all. I know that through my experience, whenever I got upset around my friends, they would always try to cheer me up which felt good sometimes but I also felt like I needed to be upset at times to grieve... so be a shoulder to cry on and be there to listen. There are no magical words and no one can take the pain away. – **Christine, 19**

Include your grieving friend in your daily activity. Even if it just a simple sports game, the few hours they will be playing or practicing that sport will allow them to get their mind off of things and do them some good. They might not play as well as usual, but it will allow them to feel wanted and appreciated for who they really are... Even if you think they might not be 100% the same person anymore, they are still your friend and still need you to be part of their life. Always try to include your grieving friend in your activities. Even if they do not come to all of them, it does not mean they do not wish to go, and they will appreciate the invite. – **Jonathan, 23**

When I first found out my Dad was going to die, I asked all my friends to not tell me that they were sorry, but just to listen to me. Now I understand that no one really knows what to say when they find out you have gone through something so horrible. I guess I just wish people would respect me for what I have gone through and not expect me to fall to pieces. Also, please don't tell me that your dog died. It is not the same thing. – **Sarah, 19**

I truly wish people wouldn't say they're sorry. I know, they're just giving their condolences, but they didn't do anything wrong. Therefore they shouldn't be saying sorry. Instead, a hug would truly help. And maybe, telling me that they're there whenever I need them. That helps a lot, instead of saying sorrys. – **Meena, 16**

Avoid saying that they will be better in *x* amount of time, for example saying to them "in a few weeks you will be back to your old self again". All grief is different and not everybody reacts the same way toward the loss of a loved one. This means that you have to give your grieving friend the time he/she needs to grieve and give them support. – **Jonathan, 23**



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Marie Abbott, 2010

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*"The first duty of
love is to listen"*

-Paul Tillich

DO let them know that you care about them and they're not alone.

DO ask: "What can I do for you"?

DO give your friend permission to express his or her feelings without fear of criticism or judgment. You could say: "Would you like to talk? I'll listen."

DO say "I'm sorry that you're having to go through this" instead of "I'm sorry"

DO recognize that the process of grief takes as long as it takes. Allow your friend to grieve at his or her own pace.

DO be aware that Christmas, birthdays, the anniversary of the death, etc will be difficult for your friend. Let them know you are thinking about them.

DO understand the importance of the loss. Accept that your friend's life will never be the same again.

DO be on the lookout for destructive behaviors. Loss can lead some people into depression, alcohol or drug abuse. Talk to someone you trust if you're worried about your friend.

DO keep being a friend.

DO listen, listen, listen

DON'T avoid a friend who is grieving. Being avoided adds pain to an already painful experience.

DON'T change the subject just because you find it difficult or because your friend is getting upset

DON'T avoid mentioning their loss out of fear of reminding them of their pain (You can be sure they haven't forgotten)

DON'T be afraid to say "I don't know"

DON'T tell your friend how they should feel or what they should do.

"I don't care so much what you say, as long as I know you care"

- Lynne Hughes

Never say...

I know how you feel
I understand
It was God's plan
She's in a better place
At least he's not suffering anymore
You'll get over it
It's time to move on



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