# How to Support a Grieving Friend

Grieving can be a long tough process. Watching a friend go through it can also be difficult. However, grieving friends need you to be consistent and understanding to help them get through the grieving process. Here are a few things to consider as you provide help and a sense of balance as you support your grieving friend and the family.

1. Be sensitive. Think about what you say BEFORE you say it. In fact, practice it in the mirror before you leave home. Remember loved ones are trying to keep a tight grip on their emotions, especially when in public view.

1. Focus on celebrating the deceased’s life. Share your positive memories to remind others of the person’s wonderful qualities.

1. For many people, the nights seem unbearably long. You may want to offer to sleep over on an agreed upon date and time.

1. If crying makes you uncomfortable, don’t let it hold you back from supporting your friend. Your friend is more important than your comfort, at this point.

1. The first week or so after losing a loved one, many people call to check on the spouse or family members. This is when there seems to be a constant stream of people in and out of the house. You can help most by offering to do something specific. Look for a need and add it to a list on the refrigerator door.

1. Losing a loved one is not comparable to losing a pet, in any shape or form. This is about people. Save your “pet” story for a more relevant time. Talk about good memories of and with the family, which includes the deceased.

1. If you don’t know what to say, “I’m sorry,” is always appropriate. Being with the family is what’s most important. Sometimes all the bereaved needs is to now you’re there and available.

1. Each family member may have different needs during the initial time of grieving. Some may need people near to help them deal with things while others need to spend more time alone. Ask how you can help an individual rather than assume what they “should” need.

1. Before trying to help others, learn about the stages of grief and grieving in general. This will help you to keep your foot out of your mouth and understand what actions may help most.

1. The amount of attention the family receives may overwhelm them. Offer to take them out to eat, where they won’t run into people they know. This gives them some “normal” time when they can just be themselves and talk about “everyday” sorts of things.

1. Laughter and smiles are allowed. Of course, it should be at the appropriate time, when someone shares a funny story.

1. As a close family friend, discretely note important dates that may trigger the grief next year or for several years. Memories of birthdays, wedding anniversaries, death dates, hospital visit dates, etc., may bring back a flood of emotions so be prepared.

1. Gently encourage the family members to talk about the deceased. They may feel guilty about remembering and talking about the good things. However sharing these memories helps to begin the healing process.

1. Never, ever, suggest that someone stop crying or laughing, unless they are actually hysterical. In which case, notify a qualified professional to help.

1. Try to avoid spouting out clichés such as, “I know just how you feel, Time heals all wounds, or at least he/she is out of pain.” These tend to trivialize the person’s sense of loss and push them to “get over it” when they aren’t ready, yet.

1. Depending on the cause of death, there may be a great deal of anger, especially when it was an untimely demise due to an accident or an intentional act.

1. Realize and accept that grieving can be a very long process. Follow your friend’s lead regarding what they need to do at any given time. Just be supportive, no matter what route they need to take to grieve it through and come to terms with it.

1. Help your grieving friends accept that it’s ok to be emotional as they work through grief. Regardless of the emotion, they should give themselves permission to feel it. The only exception is related to suicide or murder.

1. Your friend will need you more once the chaos has lessened some and most people have stopped calling. It is usually about three months after the death, when you will be needed most. During this time, your friend will need you to help them “go on” with life, which often includes building new “daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly routines.” Now would be a good time to plan to do a routine or two as a “team.”

1. Expect, recognize, and accept mood swings as part of the healing process, especially in the first year or so. To help your friend, gradually pre-plan things to do together before “holidays” or “special days” related to the deceased.