



MOSAIC MENTAL HEALTH TIPS

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How to Help When a Loved One is Grieving

By: Elizabeth Spellman, MSW, LCSW
<https://tinyurl.com/39yzdunv>

In times of heartbreak it is often difficult to think of concrete ways to help those who are grieving. Making a thoughtful gesture, regardless of how small, can help replenish a griever's emotional reserve. With our personal and professional experiences in mind, we created a list of ways to better support your friend or loved one in need.

Understand that you cannot fix their sadness.

This will be important to remember on the first day after a loss and even years later. Grief, especially after the loss of a child, is something you carry with you for a lifetime. As a friend, your presence in a time that can feel isolating will be incredibly impactful. Do not try to sensationalize the details of the loss or put a positive spin on everything they say. Let your loved one feel how they feel, even when it is hard to hear. Some sugges

"Would you like to be distracted today or would you like to talk about how your heart feels?"

"I cannot imagine how hard this is for you. I'm free to sit on a couch with you and talk, or to say nothing, any day."

Anecdotes can be harmful.

Trying to find the right thing to say can feel overwhelming. Whether at the funeral, during an encounter at the supermarket or office, or checking in on a friend months later, your consistent outreach and presence will be more important than finding the perfect thing to say. However, it is also important to acknowledge that anecdotes, even if said with good intention, can be harmful for the griever. Examples: "At least he isn't suffering anymore," "You are young enough, you can have another child," "He is in a better place," "At least you have two other children" "Johnny wouldn't want you to feel that way."

Instead of leaning on societal anecdotes, consider saying:

"I have been thinking about you and (deceased person's name) a lot. If I can take the kids so you can have some alone time, let me know."

"I'm really sorry about (deceased person's name). I know coming back to work will have its ups and downs, so if you need me to cover when you need a break, just let me know."

Examine your own discomfort with death.

When considering how to support a grieving loved one, much of the discomfort we feel comes from living in a culture where talking about death is frequently avoided. The more we openly discuss death and our fears, sadness and loss in general, the less anxiety we may feel. This will require intention and practice. Talk to your friends and family (who aren't actively grieving) about death and loss. Outwardly express the challenges in these conversations. What do they bring up for you? What makes you nervous or anxious? Can you imagine how the griever could feel?



Avoid comparisons and timelines.

Although exchanging similar personal experiences is typically helpful in relationships, exchanging grief responses with people who have lost children could potentially damage your bond. (If you believe you have helpful advice, it will be important to start the phrase with, "I know that our losses and pain will be incredibly different, but _____ was helpful to me.") It is critical to not assume that any one person's grief is the same. Avoid sending books or resources without conversation or context. Grieving parents often feel incredibly raw and vulnerable for many years, and you need to be aware that there is NOT a timeline for "better."

5 Concrete ways to help

- **Hard days**

Put the deceased's death date and their birthday on your calendar every year. Call, text or visit on these days and whenever they come across your mind. Don't wait to acknowledge your friend's loss. Be consistent and reliable.

- **When help is helpful**

Grieving families often hear "Let us know how we can help." However, in crisis, it's often challenging to know how to respond. Providing logistical assistance for daily responsibilities can be supportive at a time when tasks feel burdensome. Does the family have elderly loved ones who they typically support? Offer to visit that person, creating a few hours of free time for the griever. Arrange school drop offs or plan play dates if they have other children. Mow their lawn, bring in their trash cans, or hire a cleaning service. Immediate support is helpful, but spreading the love throughout the year shows intention, making makes families feel less isolated. Do we sometimes get distracted as the months pass? Absolutely. Put a reminder on your calendar to check in again.

- **Snail mail**

Send funny or encouraging postcards. No long messages are necessary. Just tell them that you love them. Find small, inexpensive ways to let them know you are thinking of them throughout the year and beyond.



- **Meals**

In many cultures, food equals comfort. "Meal trains" are helpful, but try to avoid asking the bereaved questions about that meal train. Plan a well-rounded meal, and ask a family member to leave a permanent cooler in a safe location at their home. Families are grateful for the thoughtfulness, but often turn down food because they aren't ready to interact with people. Are you looking for a way to offer support without making a meal? Sending a note and an UberEats/Grubhub/Caviar gift card gives the family the option to order in.



- **Say their name**

Bereaved parents often miss hearing their child's name. Tell your loved one you are thinking about their child, too. Do not worry about "making them feel worse." They are likely already thinking about their loved one.



This list isn't comprehensive and your loved one's needs may differ from what has been written here. Almost any effort is better than no effort and they will know you are by their side with support. 🌈