

When a friend is dying you cannot protect her. No matter what you say or do she must walk this path. Knowing this, you may feel helpless in the face of your friend's condition. You may fear reaching out in case you say the wrong thing. We urge you not to hold back. You can be of great comfort and support to your friend at this time. This brochure will guide you in the process.



When it is time to say goodbye

You may have prepared for your friend's death, or you may have been hoping for his recovery; either way you face a difficult grieving process, and will need support to move through it. Understand that your feelings will be complicated. It is natural to feel relief that your friend is no longer suffering. You are also likely to feel sorrow, guilt, anger, and acceptance. Seek out people you can talk to and be with, who are willing to share your journey through grief without judgement. When you feel safe, allow yourself to confide your thoughts, feelings and memories. Nurture yourself with balanced meals and rest.

It takes courage to move forward

Those who have lost a loved one know that grief does not end. To heal is not to recover from grief, but to learn to live with your loss as you choose to move forward. Be patient with yourself at this time. It takes effort and courage to leave your "old self" and "normal" life behind. Know that you deserve to go on living as you remember your friend. You will find that hope emerges as you are able to make commitments to the future, reinvesting your emotional energy in life affirming activities.

*Death is a natural and permanent part of life,
just as grief is a natural and permanent part of
love. As life and love are to be embraced, so then
must death and grief be experienced and shared.
In sharing, we find the path to healing.*

We offer this brochure as a means to convey our support. This brochure is not meant to replace the professional guidance of a psychologist or counsellor. As you move through this difficult time, please seek professional help if necessary.



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BEING THERE FOR
a friend who is dying



because *life* is important





A journey you share

This is also a heartbreaking time for you. Be gentle with yourself as you share your friend's journey and come to terms with her condition. Reach out to your loved ones for support along the way.

Understand your friend's challenges

Take time to learn about your friend's illness. It will give you insight into his experience, and empower you to help him. Your local library or the internet are excellent resources. Your friend may also allow you to talk with his doctor. The more you know, the more prepared you will be for the progression of his illness.

Your friend is likely to lose his autonomy and freedom along the way, and you will both grieve for his losses.

Very often we define our importance by our ability to do – to act and to plan. As your friend loses this power and becomes dependent on others, it may be difficult for him to believe that he is “worth” anything or that his life has meaning. Comfort your friend with the truth that his worth is not in doing, but in being – in being a loving friend, a loving parent, a loving colleague. Share with him how he enriches your life by being in it. Show your friend what he means to you by being with him now.

Being there

Your visits will mean so much to your friend, whether you watch videos or play chess together, or simply sit in each other's company. Visit her often – show her you are willing to face each challenge with her.

Before you call in, phone to arrange a time. Ask your friend how long she would like you to stay, and if there is anything you can bring her. Find out if there is something special she would like to do.

Be sensitive to what your friend wants rather than what you think she needs. Understand that her illness will make her tired, and sometimes she won't feel like company. Encourage her to call you when she is ready for another visit.

Don't feel you must be your friend's only means of support. Take time out to nurture yourself and meet your own commitments. This will energise and calm you, so that when you do visit your friend you can give her your undivided attention.

Listen with compassion

Your friend may not wish to talk about his illness. Don't force him. When he does feel ready to talk, the most loving thing you can do is listen without judgement or expectation. Your friend is not looking for suggestions or advice – no one can mend his losses or take away his pain. What he needs is your loving presence as he pours out his emotion.

Talking about your friend's illness may confront you with the reality of losing him. Whatever you do, don't hide behind clichés such as “At least you have had a good life” or “Maybe it's God's plan”. These words don't help – they diminish your friend's losses and deny his need to grieve. Make it safe for your friend to feel all of his emotions. Be open to the experience. Learn from him.

The best help is often practical

There are many practical ways you can help your friend: preparing meals, sharing overnight care, looking after children, doing the washing, paying the bills. It may not be enough to ask what you can do – your friend may not

know, or may be reluctant to impose. When you see something needs doing, leap in and lend a hand. Be available to help in the weeks and months ahead.

Your friend may have a dying wish she needs your help with. She may wish to return to a place she has known, or visit a place she has dreamed of. She may wish to renew contact with someone who was once an important part of her life. With your assistance she can achieve these goals, and find closure and peace.

Keep in touch

Sometimes you can't visit as often as you would like. Be sure to keep in touch in other ways: via letters or the internet, or by calling. Tell your friend how much you love her, and reminisce about the special times you have shared. Now is the time to be open about the way you feel. With each contact, promise you'll be in touch again soon. Keep your promises.

At times you may feel you can't cope with seeing your friend. Do not judge yourself. Attempt to understand your resistance, and explore ways you can become more open. It may help to confide in a counsellor. Be honest with your friend, recognising that her feelings come first.

Find comfort in your spirituality

Grief is a natural part of love. Your faith won't take your grief away. What it can do is give you comfort and strength as you share your friend's final days. Your faith is a light of hope you can shine into your future. If you are upset at God, it is okay. Accept this as part of your grieving process. Find someone who will listen to your thoughts and feelings with compassion.