

Anticipated loss

Your friend may have lost someone to a long-term illness. While she may have begun the grieving process, this does not mean she won't grieve at the time of death. She may have prepared for the death, or she may have been hoping for a miracle; either way she faces a difficult grieving process, and will need you to be there for her.

Community services and support groups

Where appropriate, encourage your friend to seek help within the community, from a counsellor, therapist, hospice or church. A support group can also be wonderfully healing. People who have been through, or are going through, the same thing really do understand. They are good listeners, they share their grief, and they provide each other with practical strategies for coping with daily life. A support group will give your friend the opportunity to create meaningful connections as he rebuilds his life.

Being there for holidays and anniversaries

Be mindful of events that emphasise your friend's loss, such as Christmas, anniversaries, and other meaningful occasions. Your friend is likely to experience her grief anew at such times, and will need your support and understanding. Remember, you cannot take her grief away - you can only help her move through it.

Encourage your friend to talk about and plan for these events in advance, so that individual family members know what to expect. Perhaps you could help create a special tradition that includes the memory of the loved one. Make it safe for your friend to change her mind and do something different if she needs to. Afterwards, talk openly about how it went, and plan any changes for next time.

Never doubt your capacity to help

Your loving support will make the world of difference to your grieving friend. Overcome your sense of helplessness and reach out. These words can bring great comfort - don't be afraid to say them, mean them, and act on them:

- I'm sorry.
- I'm sad for you.
- I'm here to listen.
- What can I do?
- I'll call you tomorrow.
- Take all the time you need.

Know that 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.



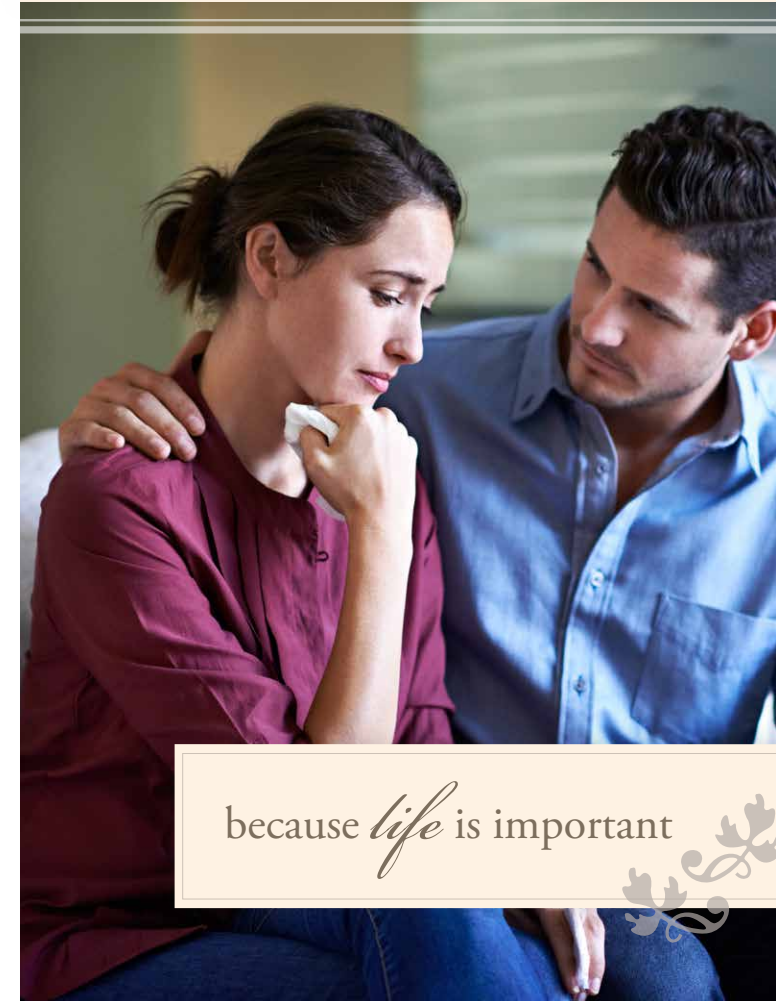
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BEING THERE FOR
a friend who is grieving



because *life* is important





You can help a grieving friend

When a friend loses someone she loves you cannot protect her from grief. Grief is a natural part of love - no matter what you say or do she will feel it anyway. Knowing this, you may feel helpless in the face of your friend's grief. 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.

Ways you are needed

At this time, your friend needs you to:

- Simply be there, to listen and to comfort;
- Offer practical assistance;
- Allow him to experience his grief in his own way; and
- Continue your support in the weeks and months after the death.

Listen with compassion

Simply being there can be of great comfort to your friend. Attend the funeral if you can; it is your first opportunity to express your love and concern. We suggest you also write a personal note of sympathy, perhaps sharing a treasured memory of the person who passed away, and what that person meant to you. Your own words at this time are much more precious than those on a greeting card.

Don't be afraid to speak the name of the person who has died. Your friend will be comforted by the name of her loved one, and will know that you, too, hold them in your heart.

When your friend is ready to talk, the most loving thing you can do is to listen without judgement or expectation. Your friend is not looking for suggestions or advice - no one can fix what has happened. What your friend needs is your loving presence as she pours out her emotion.

You may feel confronted talking about death as it brings you face-to-face with your own fears and beliefs at this time. Don't feel you must have answers. Be open to the experience - learn as you share your friend's journey through grief.

By releasing your own need to have answers and to "fix" your friend's grief, you avoid the risk of saying the wrong thing. Clichés such as "time will heal" or "at least he is out of pain" don't help - they hurt. Remember, grief is not something that can be removed; it must be moved through. Do not be afraid to share your friend's journey - your support is a gift she will treasure.

Offer practical help

There are many practical ways you can help a grieving friend - preparing meals, answering calls, looking after children, doing the washing, paying the bills. It may not be enough to ask what you can do - your grieving 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 not just in the early days, but in the weeks and months ahead.

Everyone grieves differently

Grief is unique to everyone. There is no 'normal' way of expressing grief - it is not experienced in neat stages. Your friend will have good days and bad days. He may experience the full gamut of emotions: denial, anger, guilt, sadness, resolution. And these feelings are likely to occur unpredictably for months after the death. Understand that there is no set time frame for healing. Be patient with your friend. Allow him to grieve in his own way, and in his own time.

Your friend needs your ongoing support

Sadly, many survivors lack support when they need it most - in the months after the death when 'unreality' gives way to acute pain. Be aware that much of your friend's support network may dissipate as people return to their own lives.

Traumatic loss

Your friend may have lost his loved one traumatically - perhaps through suicide, an accident or by another's hand. The traumatic nature of the loss can make it extremely difficult to come to terms with. Your friend may be searching for answers, and confronting the fact that life is not fair and that bad things do happen to good people. His world may no longer feel safe, and his belief system may not work. All of these issues can complicate grieving.

A traumatic death commonly leaves survivors feeling dazed and numb until the reality of their loss sinks in. Your friend's pain may not become real for months. Where legal action is involved, your friend may experience renewed grief throughout. He will need your ongoing support and compassion.