



Supporting A Grieving Friend

How to Support A Grieving Classmate

It is not always easy for anyone, including adults, to know how to relate to and interact with a grieving person. No one wants to say or do the “wrong” thing and upset the person further. But the worst thing we can do for grieving people is to ignore them and let them grieve in isolation. This handout will help you better understand what grief is, how it may be experienced, and practical ways you can be supportive.

Grief is...

- A normal and natural response to the death of a loved one
- Very individual; everyone grieves differently
- Something that comes in waves, and can be triggered anywhere and anytime
- Not time limited; people don’t “get over it.”
- Not a sign that a person is weak, crazy, or has a mental disorder

Grief may be experienced in the following ways...

- Grieving people may feel a wide variety of emotions such as sadness, anger, guilt, confusion, numbness, disbelief, relief, and shock.
- Grieving people may experience changes in their appetite and sleep patterns. They may feel very tired. They may cry a lot, a little, or not at all. They may or may not want to talk.
- Grieving people may withdraw and isolate themselves from friends and family. They may also withdraw from social events or previous activities that they enjoyed before the death occurred.
- Grieving people may be very irritable and have significant mood swings, or they might act as if nothing happened.



Do's and Don'ts for Supporting Your Grieving Classmate...

- Do acknowledge the loss.
- Do share any genuine feelings or positive memories about the person who died.
- Do say: "I'm so sad to hear that your mom (or whoever) died."
- Do say: "I don't really know what to say, but just know that I am here for you in whatever ways you might need."
- Do be a really good listener; listen much more than you talk
- Do consider giving your grieving classmate a hug, if you are comfortable with that, but always ask permission first.
- Do tell your grieving classmate that you have missed him or her.
- Do continue to invite your grieving classmate to participate in group activities, parties, and social events, even if he/she initially says no.
- Do ask your grieving classmate what you can specifically do to help and support him or her.
- Do provide a sense of normalcy, and continue to talk about other things that you may have in common.
- Don't give advice or tell your grieving classmate how to feel ("Cheer up, think of all you have to be grateful for," "At least your other sibling is still alive, etc.)
- Don't compare losses ("I know just how you feel; my cousin died six months ago"). Keep the focus on your grieving classmate and their current loss.
- Don't judge or criticize your grieving classmate, and don't have expectations about how he or she should or should not act.
- Don't ask questions about the death; just listen if he/she wants to tell you about it.
- Don't gossip about your grieving classmate. Talk with others about, how together, you can support and help the person.
- Don't say things such as: "He's (She's) in a better place now"
- Don't say: "It's been (however long the time period)." "Shouldn't you be over this by now?"
- Don't pressure the person to talk if he/she doesn't want to.
- Don't tell your grieving classmate not to think about the death.
- Don't tell your grieving classmate what he/she should do in order to feel better. Instead, ask: "What are things you do that help you when you feel sad?"

Hopefully, these guidelines will empower you to feel more knowledgeable, comfortable, and confident in your abilities to support a grieving classmate.



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