

# Responding to People in Grief

Too often we don't know what to say to a person in grief, so we offer a cliché to minimize the loss. Too often we can't stand to witness another person's pain, so we offer a cliché to hurry the grief process. What may be a healing insight for the survivor is often an empty platitude when dispensed by others. Instead, give your presence, give your patience, and allow the griever to find his or her own path.

There are simple ways to respond that show the person you care and will be there to support them.

## What to Say:

- I'm sorry for your loss.
- Is there any specific way I can help you right now? (Make specific suggestions, like picking up the kids, cutting the grass, etc.)
- I can't even imagine how much you are hurting.
- Can I call you and check in with you every so often? (Don't expect them to remember to call you.)
- I promise you I won't go away.
- Would you like to talk about it? I want to hear your story.
- It's okay with me if you cry.
- How are you doing?
- I'm sorry.
- This must be painful for you.
- You must have loved him/her very much.
- It's okay for you to grieve/cry.
- You're grieving just the right way for you.
- Be patient with yourself.
- It's okay to be angry at...
- I'm praying for you.
- I'll be thinking about you.
- He/she had a wonderful gift for...
- He/she was very lucky to have you.
- Let's get together soon (and do it!)
- If a grieving person asks, "Why did this happen?" it's best to answer "I don't know."

People often try to comfort grieving persons with inappropriate comments coming from their own awkwardness, discomfort and fear, with statements like...

## What Not to Say:

- I know how you feel.
- You shouldn't feel that way.
- It was God's will.
- Don't think about it.
- You're so strong.
- You'll get over it.
- You must get on with your life.
- You'll find someone else.
- Be thankful you have other children.
- He/she led a full life.
- It would have been worse if...
- Call if there's anything I can do.

### **“Be Strong” Clichés (Translation: “Don’t cry in front of me!”)**

- You have to be strong.
- Men don’t cry.
- You’re being so brave.
- You are doing so well.
- You’re the man/woman of the house.
- Don't cry--you'll feel better soon.

### **Discounting Clichés (Translation: “You don’t know how lucky you are!”)**

- It’s nature’s way.
- You’re still young.
- Time will make it better.
- Smile. It could be worse.
- You’re lucky you had children.
- This happened for the best.
- I know just how you feel.
- At least he went fast.
- She would have been a burden.
- She’s no longer suffering.
- She was so sick--it's good it's over.
- Keep busy--you'll forget.
- I know how you feel; my \_\_\_\_\_ died.
- But you have such good memories.

### **Religious-Based Clichés (Translation: “How can you even be sad?”)**

- It’s God’s will.
- This is part of God’s plan.
- God needs him more than you do.

### **“Get On With Life” Clichés (Translation: “We’re tired of hearing this!”)**

- Tears won’t bring him back.
- Are you over the worst of it?
- She would have wanted you to.
- You should be over this by now.
- It's time to get on with your life.

Just reach out a hand. Be there in the silence and let them have their feelings. Sometimes just sitting with someone without having to say anything is the greatest gift you can give them.

Don't stop trying to make contact over the months (unless they clearly ask you to); they will appreciate your care even if they can't take you up on it yet. Sometimes it takes weeks or months before a grieving person is able to reach out for help.

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