

Helping Others Who Are Grieving

Baptist Burden Bearers

Understand that they have been injured in areas that you can't see

If we were to meet up with someone that was on crutches, in a wheel chair or had one of their limbs in a cast we would instantly know that they were hurting. Grief is not so obvious. While grief affects all of our being most of the damage is internal. There will be times when the grief rises to the surface and we see outward behavior but for the most part we need to understand that the pain and suffering won't be that obvious. Just remember that they are injured and hurting on the inside.

Don't ignore them

Being uncomfortable around grieving people is a very common reaction in our culture. We don't know what to say or how to act so we decide just to keep our distance. This may be one of the worse actions that we can take. They are already devastated and if we add to that the impression that we don't want to be around them it only multiplies the damage.

Don't try to fix their grief

You can't take away their pain. They must go through it. Let them cry and mourn and release the tension and stress on their own. Walk along side of them but don't push or pull them. Grief can't be "fixed". It must be endured. Be available but not overbearing. Don't offer unsolicited advice. Just let them know that you are there when they need you ... for whatever reason.

Encourage them to talk and then you listen

Most grieving people want to talk about their loss. In fact they *need* to talk about it. Depending on their usual personality they may talk more or less but there is *stuff* built up inside them and they need to get it out. Don't make the mistake of you talking just for the sake of talking. Many times you'll be tempted to talk too much because you're uncomfortable and you don't know how to relate. You feel like you just have to say something. Let them talk and you listen, and listen and listen.

Be compassionate not judgmental

Allow them to express their feelings and even "act out of character" at times without trying to correct or criticize them. Obviously you don't want to allow them to hurt themselves (or someone else) but be understanding and forgiving. They are experiencing a journey that has no road map for how they should act and they are finding their way through the wilderness as they go.

Allow them to use you as a release for their grief

There will be times when they just need someone to "unload on". The grief may be boiling over and the frustrations about to explode. It's at these times that they will need a real friend. Someone that doesn't judge, criticize or condemn. When someone is experiencing extreme grief is not the time to remind them of how they should behave. You be the person that is there for them and don't take it personally when they fail to show any gratitude or appreciation for your efforts.

Be Patient

There are no time limits on recovering from grief. In reality, a grief journey never ends. It just takes a person down a different road than what they had planned. The road may not be as rough as it gets longer but there will always be the occasional "detours" and "road blocks".

Do practical things for them

Bereaved people have a tendency to let things go in their life. After losing a loved one or enduring a major life disaster those every day duties like washing clothes, cooking, mowing the lawn just don't seem important anymore. Offer to help but don't be overbearing. You don't want to try and control their lives, just be a help. They may or may not want you to come into their house and clean or mow their grass. Give them time.

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Be a Watchful Grief Partner

Call or visit them often. Keep an eye on them just as you would watch someone recovering from a physical injury. Don't take things personally when they don't respond as you would expect. Be their friend regardless of their reactions or thankfulness. If you feel that they may be headed in a questionable direction then contact a professional and get advice. You are there to walk the journey with them, regardless of what happens, for as long as it takes.

Be aware of certain emotional days

Holidays and anniversaries can be hard. These are days that will intensify the grief. Don't try and force them to take part if they aren't ready. Let them progress on their own. This is especially true for the anniversary date of a death. There can be a tremendous fear of a death "happening all over again".

Share your love for them and your memories of their loved one

It is easy to buy and send a canned sympathy card but it takes work and thought to write a personal note. You don't have to make it an elaborate letter but a short simple note of encouragement is a tremendous help. If they lost a loved one then write down a memory about that loved one. A hand written note is a great resource for them to carry with them. Even a short text with a few simple words are a great treasure to someone who is grieving. This is especially true when it gets close to the anniversary of their loss. The time of the year when a person endured a traumatic grief event can be very stressful and sometimes overpowering. The actual anniversary date of their loss is a great time to contact them just to let them know you are thinking about them and praying for them.

Things to say that will help rather than hurt

- Nothing – Sometimes it's best to say nothing and maybe give a hug instead
- I don't know how you feel but I know you hurt
- Call me anytime, night or day
- I'm praying for you
- I'm coming over today/tomorrow to ...
- Tell me about ...
- I love you
- The pain must be unbearable
- I loved (deceased name) too and I miss him/her

Avoid clichés that hurt rather than help

- I understand
- I know how you're feeling
- They're in a better place now
- They aren't hurting anymore
- God will give you more children
- God just wanted them in Heaven
- You'll feel better in time
- You'll find another husband/wife soon
- There is a reason for everything
- It was his/her time to go
- How are you doing?
- God won't give us more than we can handle
- Remember, you need to be strong for ...
- Let me know if I can do anything
- You should be over it by now
- He/she lived a good life
- Others have had it worse than you
- At least he/she isn't hurting anymore
- Keep your chin up
- Try not to think too much about him/her
- At least he/she didn't suffer
- It's time to move on
- He/she wouldn't want you to be sad
- Be thankful for the time you had with them