

FIFTY WAYS TO HEAL A GRIEVING FRIEND

When a friend experiences the death of a loved one, go to your friend, listen, show you care. Continuc to share your concern throughout the entire difficult first year.

1. Ask a simple question about the person who has died. Give the grieving individual an opportunity to talk if they wish.
2. Offer to go to the arrangement conference at the funeral home.
3. Speak of the deceased family member or friend by name when talking with your grieving friend.
4. Allow for tears, anger and other expressions of emotion. You may be uncomfortable at first, but know that this expression of grief is key to healing.
5. Help arrange housing and transportation for out-of-town visitors.
6. If you are preparing a meal for the home of the grieving, use disposable dishes.
7. If your friend is receptive to your assistance, tape your phone number to their phone, so that the bereaved family might contact you with minimum effort.
8. Consider making a light meal, such as sandwiches, that can be eaten during a break at the visitation. Prepare a tray of fruit and rolls that can be available to the family before the service.
9. Attend both the visitation and funeral services when possible.
10. Give children truthful information about the death.
11. Use correct terms with children, eg "Grandpa died." (We did not lose him. He is not sleeping.)
12. Children of any age should be invited (not excluded or forced) to join their family and attend the visitation and funeral service. The amount of time spent will be determined by the interest, maturity and comfort level of the child.
13. Send children sympathy cards or notes. They need their pain recognized also.
14. Children sometimes respond to the news of a death by playing or ignoring the information. Remind friends and family that this behavior only means that they are processing the painful truth a little at a time.
15. Provide time for the child to tell you or another trusted adult about the special person who died.
16. Learn when out of town guests are returning home, so you can call or stop by during first week the grieving person or grieving family is alone.
17. Write your friend a letter and describe special memories you have of the person who died.
18. Give a gift of food on a good plate so you can visit again when you collect the plate.
19. Avoid encouraging the bereaved to "get back to normal" or "get on with their lives." Grief is a different process for each individual.
20. Driving can be a challenge for the bereaved for a long time. Offer to drive or accompany the bereaved person on errands.
21. Remember that pictures and mementos of the person who died may bring comfort to one grieving person and painful reminders to another grieving person.
22. Offer to attend church with the bereaved person. Following a death it is often difficult going to church alone.

23. If you have been through grief, share a little of your own story, so that your grieving friend feels less alone, knowing that you have some understanding of his/her pain.
24. Share a copy of a favorite poem or prayer with your grieving friend.
25. For the grieving person, activity can be helpful, but it is not necessarily healthy to stay too busy.
26. Grief has no SHOULDs or SHOULD NOTs.
27. As the months pass, short frequent visits and calls to the bereaved family are appreciated. The bereaved rarely have the energy to set up meetings or call for help.
28. Respect the needs of your grieving friend. Some bereaved have a need to visit the cemetery often, while others visit infrequently or not at all.
29. Offer to go to the cemetery with your grieving friend a few months following the funeral.
30. The bereaved person has the right to grieve each death to the extent of their relationship with the deceased. Society sometimes discounts a death if the person was very old or very sick.
31. Encourage the grieving to stay on schedule with routine yearly medical and dental appointments.
32. Your friend may recount a single extraordinary event of closeness with the deceased. Experiencing the presence of the deceased is spoken of more often in certain cultures than others.
33. Pray for your grieving friend and gently let him/her know that you are doing so.
34. Establish a simple tradition, such as breakfast one Saturday a month, so that you and your grieving friend have a time together that your friend can rely on.
35. Make available information about support groups or grief retreats.
36. Allow the grieving to tell their story as often as they need to repeat it.
37. Collect photos of the deceased from your own photo collection and have them copied for your grieving friend.
38. Remember your grieving friend on those difficult days: Christmas, Mother's Day and Father's Day, holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries, and the anniversary of the date the loved one died.
39. If you have always acknowledged the birthday or anniversary of your friend with remembrance, be creative and consider the circumstances of the bereaved. A widower with children would appreciate a gift certificate for a home-delivered pizza. A widow might appreciate a gift certificate for a beauty shop.
40. Compile a list of those generous talented persons who have offered to teach new skills to the bereaved (cooking, tax preparation, driver's training).
41. When your grieving friend declines your invitation or suggestion, accept the decision gracefully.
42. Remember that the grieving also need quiet alone time for reflection and remembering.
43. Remind family, neighbors, and co-workers of the grieving person to offer companionship and not management.
44. Speak up, risk your friendship and suggest professional help when you observe your friend abusing alcohol and/or drugs.
45. Assure the grieving that you have no timetable or agenda for their grief.
46. Consult the grieving person before planning a celebration party for a special occasion. The occasion might be too difficult for them to attend the first year.

47. Be willing to contact educational resources and request lists of grief materials in the form of books, TV specials, lecture presentations, movies, newspaper and magazine articles, and memorial remembrance programs.
48. Clichés are not helpful and often leave the bereaved feeling that their pain is being considered trivial. ("It was God's will." "He/she is out of pain now." "You can have another baby." "God does not give you more that you can handle.")
49. Continue to support your grieving friend during the second year following the death.
50. Listen, listen and then listen some more.

In our efforts to support the bereaved, we can offer them our presence, our affection and our willingness to listen. Effective support of the bereaved is more dependent on careful listening than on any words that we can say.

From the National Catholic Ministry to the Bereaved, Cleveland, Ohio.