

How Do You Help Someone Who is Grieving? *by Maureen Hunter*

When someone is grieving, knowing what to say can mean you can give you so much and it costs so little. It can be very uncomfortable to be with someone in the midst of such pain and anguish. Quite often we just want to fix it for them and make the pain go away. We may have no idea what to say or where to begin and are anxious about saying the wrong thing. It's easier then to avoid them altogether. No, it's not! Here are some tips for you, so you can best support someone who is grieving.

9 Tips for Helping Someone Who Is Grieving

- 1. Acknowledge their loss** - It is important you tell them you know what has happened. You know the bottom has fallen out of their world. Phone them, text them, email them, write them, facebook them . It can be simply "Thinking of you" or "I am so sorry to hear about....." You are acknowledging the importance of that person in their lives.
- 2. Don't be afraid to say the name of the person who has died** - even though the person is no longer on this earth, they lived. Their presence is all around the person grieving, in memories and personal items. They existed and will always exist for that person in some way. Saying their name is a gift and sharing a memory even more so.
- 3. Allow them to talk about how they are feeling** - If they want to cry, let them cry. If they are angry let them be angry. If they are feeling guilty, as they very likely will, let them talk about that. All these emotions are a very normal part of grief. You don't have to fix it, make it better, tell them it could be worse or anything similar. All you have to do is be there with them and listen without fixing. They just need a safe place to vent. If you can sit there and let a person cry their whole heart out without interrupting, just letting them be until the tears are spent, you are indeed a true friend.
- 4. Understand that there is no timeline for grieving** - grief isn't over in 3 days or a week. It is something that never ends in a sense. Over time there is an adjustment and adaptation to that loss, but there is no 'getting over' it in the literal sense. Therefore don't expect them to be fully functioning in a week or two. Their whole world has been shattered. Some days will be better than others. Some days they won't want to do anything and other days they will cry. Just accept if you can where they are and avoid being part of the move on brigade.*
- 5. Refrain from offering platitudes or comparing losses** - whilst this can be helpful, in many cases it isn't. Saying, "They are in a better place." really doesn't help someone who has lost the most precious person in the world. Especially if they are young, they want them here with them not somewhere else. There may be many other things you are tempted to say in an attempt to make them feel better. You don't need to. Losses can't be compared; the pain is still the pain. However comparing someone's loss against your own may actually hurt more than help. If you want to show them you understand a little of what you are going through, you can say "I am so sorry. Whilst I don't know how you are feeling exactly, I do understand what it is like to lose a loved one." You have told them you too have experienced grief, which then opens the door. Remember you don't have to fix it or take their pain away. Just be there and listen.
- 6. Keep in touch** - so often there is such a flurry of activity after the death. Arrangements to be made, details finalized, paperwork to be completed. In the first few weeks there may be family around and frequent visitors. In most cases, people drift off after the first month. They have lives to get on with. This is the time when you can be much needed and appreciated. It can be a visit, thinking of you call or suggest going out for lunch. Often it can be the time when a lovely card or a single flower delivered to the door will touch their heart so deeply.
- 7. Don't run away in the supermarket** - avoidance can be a coping mechanism. This happened to me often or friends just dropped out of my life. It hurt so much at the time but now I understand why. They just didn't know what to say or couldn't deal with my pain. I felt at times I had the plague and they thought it might be catching. Just a few words, a touch on the shoulder can mean so much.
- 8. Include them in your life** - grieving can be exhausting and the emotions of grief overwhelming. It is often difficult to cope with crowds or social circumstances. It just depends on the day. So if you have extended an invitation a few times and they have said no, don't give up. Allow them the gift of time and the gift of spontaneity. Often they may not know how they will feel until that day dawns. Understand also that whilst going out might be a welcome distraction for some, for others it is the last thing they want to do. Bringing a latte to the house might be just the thing. They might not even want that. Their own company is all they want right now. Respect them where they are at.
- 9. Know that the calendar is a big part of their life** - birthdays, family celebrations, festive times of the year and the anniversary date of a loved one's death can become very significant. It can be so thoughtful to make a note of these dates and be in touch in some way when the date arrives. Often years later, that anniversary date can still trigger some painful emotions. Also birthdays without loved ones are especially difficult and a big family Christmas with one person missing can be torture. If you are still daunted, I would encourage you to do just one thing then. Send a card acknowledging their loss with a few personal words or a precious memory. That alone can mean so much.