

Grief Do's and Don'ts: Reaching Out to Someone Mourning a Loss

Don't:

Force the mourner into a role, by saying “You’re doing so well.” Allow the mourner to have troubling feelings without the sense of letting you down.

Tell the mourner what he or she “should” do. At best, this reinforces the mourner’s sense of incompetence, and at worst, your advice can be “off target” completely.

Say, “Call me if you need anything.” Vague offers are meant to be declined, and the mourner will pick up the cue that you implicitly hope he or she won’t contact you.

Delegate helping to others. Your personal presence and concern will make a difference.

Say, “I know how you feel.” Each griever’s experience of grief is unique. So invite the mourner to share his or her feelings, rather than presuming that you know what the issues are for that person.

Use hackneyed consultation, by saying, “There are other fish in the sea,” or “God works in mysterious ways.” This only convinces the mourner that you don’t care enough to understand.

Try to hurry people through grief by reminding them how long it’s been or by urging that they get busy, start to date, give away the deceased possessions, etc. Grief work takes time and patience and cannot be done on a fixed schedule.

Do:

Open the door to communication. If you aren’t sure what to say, ask, “How are you feeling today?” or “I’ve been thinking about you.”

Listen 80% of the time and talk 20% of the time. Very few people take the time to listen to someone’s deepest concerns. Be one of the few. Both you and the mourner are likely to learn as a result.

Offer specific help and take the initiative to call the mourner. If you also respect the individual’s privacy, your concrete assistance with the demands of daily living will be appreciated.

“Be there” for the mourner. There are few rules for helping aside from openness and caring.

Talk about your own losses and how you adapted to them. Although the mourner’s coping style may be different from your own, your self-disclosure will help.

Use appropriate physical contact – like an arm around the shoulder or a hug – when words fail. Learn to be comfortable with shared silence, rather than chattering away in an attempt to cheer the person up.

Be patient with the griever’s story, and allow him/her to share memories. This fosters a healthy continuity as the person orients to a changed future.

For help coping with grief or loss, contact Continuum EAP at: **(402) 476-0186**
or **(800) 755-7636**

You may also contact an employee assistance professional at:
easpecialist@4continuum.com