

What to Do – What Not to Do

When someone we know is grieving or distressed about something it is sometimes difficult to know what to say. Below is a list of common things that should not be said to someone who is grieving and list of things that may be more helpful.

Things Not to Say

- *“I know how you feel”* (Even if you have been through something similar, you cannot know exactly what this person is feeling and most people will feel anger at such statements because they want to feel their feelings and express their experience. There is no place for comparing experiences at this point.)
- *“There is a reason for everything” or “It’s all part of God’s plan”*. (The person may be able to find meaning in their loss later, but may not. Either way, that is something they have to come to on their own.)
- *“He/she is in a better place”* (While the person grieving may believe this themselves, this does not change the fact that they miss the presence of what is lost.)
- *“You can always...remarry, have another child, get another pet, etc.”* (One thing can never replace something that is lost. We can learn to live with our loss and we may learn love and connect again, but we will always miss that which was lost.)
- *“This is behind you now; it is time to get on with your life” or “That was so long ago, aren’t you over that yet?”* (Grief takes as long as it takes for a person and each person grieves in their own way.)
- *“You should do this” or “You shouldn’t feel that”* (Any statement of this sort is more about our discomfort and/or need to try to fix the problem and is less about the grief of the person.)

Things to Say (and do)

- *“I don’t know how you feel, but I am here to help anyway I can.”* (Do not offer to help if you don’t really mean it. It is better to offer to do specific things because those who are grieving can’t always think about more mundane needs. Either way, let the person feel what they feel, express it how they need to, and for as long as they need to.)
- *“I wish I had something to say that could make it better, but know I care about you.”* (It is better to say that you don’t know what to say than to just say something that you think might make someone feel better. You probably can’t make it better and the person just needs someone with them at that moment.)
- *Say nothing* (Instead of trying to say the “right thing”, just offer someone a hug. If you sit with someone, be comfortable with silence; don’t try to fill it. Allow them to tell you the story of how their loved one died or about their loss. Every telling of that story helps.)
- *Don’t rush grief* (Grieving takes as long as it takes and people express grief in many ways.)
- *Mind the special occasions* (The first year after a loss can be particularly difficult with the “first” holiday, birthday, etc. without the loved one. Offer extra support at those times and over time. Remember most people will offer care and support only until after the funeral.)

For additional resources on what to do and say and what not to do and say, check out the following websites:

www.helpingguide.org/mental/helping_grieving.htm

www.grief.com

www.griefspeaks.com

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