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You have a good friend who has just experienced the death of a loved one. Perhaps you know instinctively what to do, but maybe you do not.

Perhaps you have never lost a person you love. It is possible that you haven't even been to a funeral. This is not unusual.

Many people do not have occasion to attend a funeral until late in adulthood. Maybe your friend is of a different culture and you are not sure what rituals or customs would be correct.

Helping a bereaved friend is hard work and your friend may need you for months to come. In the beginning your friend will need you more, with less assistance required as time goes along.

This brochure will help you turn your cares and concerns into positive actions.

## PRACTICAL WAYS TO HELP

- Make phone calls and answer the phone. Keep a record of messages.
- Help to clean the house if it needs it.
- Keep track of food and other gifts for thank you notes. Note to whom the bowls belong.
- Help with the children. Children have special needs and may feel ignored during this time. Talk to them about what they are feeling.
- Run errands. Help prepare a list and do the ones you can, delegating the rest.
- Pick up out-of-town friends and relatives.
- Help find accommodations for out of town visitors.
- Encourage your friend to take time out to rest. Grief is exhausting.



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# HELPING A FRIEND IN GRIEF



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## EMOTIONAL WAYS TO HELP:

- Think about how much time you can give. Don't create problems in your own family. After all the guests have gone home, your friend may feel isolated and this may be a time to visit more often.
- Learn to be a good listener. This is the most important gift you can offer a grieving person. Telling his or her story can help a person to heal.
- Help your friend to organize his or her day. They may feel overwhelmed with so much to do.
- Help with thank-you notes.
- Watch the children and be aware of their emotional needs. Don't let the children be forgotten.
- Share memories. Memories are healing. Bereaved people love to hear stories about their loved ones.
- Watch for depression. It is normal for bereaved people to experience some depression. If you feel concerned about the degree, your friend may need to seek professional help.
- Identify local resources such as support groups, books, or therapists.
- Remember anniversaries and holidays. These events emphasize the absence of the person who died.
- Keep in touch by phone and email. Answering machines and email allow the bereaved person to respond only when they feel up to it.
- Invite your friend to attend events together as you normally would. Let them decide if they don't want to attend.
- Take care of yourself.

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## THINGS TO AVOID SAYING

- **"I know how you feel."** One can never know how another person feels. Instead you could ask your friend to tell you how he or she feels.
- **"It's part of God's plan."** This may make people angry.
- **"Look at what you have to be thankful for."** They know they have things to be thankful for, but right now those things may not seem important.
- **"Call if you need anything."** They aren't going to call. It is much better to offer something concrete such as "I have two free hours and I want to come over and vacuum your house or work on your lawn."
- **"He's in a better place now."** The bereaved may or may not believe this. Keep your beliefs to yourself unless asked.
- **"This is behind you now; it's time to get on with your life."** Sometimes the bereaved are resistant to getting on with their life because they feel this means "Forgetting" their loved one. Grief works at its own pace.
- **"You should..."** Statements that begin with these words are too interfering. Instead you might say "Have you thought about..."



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## DON'T:

- discourage expressions of grief. If your friend begins to cry, do not change the subject or try to stop them. Tears help healing.
- promote your own values and beliefs. Listen to your friend talk about his or her values and beliefs. It is okay to share yours if they are asked for.
- encourage dependence. Your friend may tend to lean on you too much. It is better to gently encourage independence with your support and guidance.
- tell your own stories. Just listen; telling your own experiences is not needed or appreciated. Be a listener.
- assume that if your friend is having a good day, it means that they are over their loss.

## LISTEN:

*When I ask you to listen to me, and you start giving advice, you have not done what I asked.*

*When I ask you to listen to me and you feel you have to do something to solve my problem you have failed me.*

*Listen! All I ask is that you listen, not talk or do, just hear me.*

*When you accept as a simple fact that I do feel what I feel then I can quit trying to convince you and get about the business of healing.*

*So, please listen and just hear me. If you want to talk, wait a minute for your turn and I'll listen to you.*

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