



LINDNER CENTER OF HOPE

What a Grieving Person Needs

Being a source of support for those struggling with loss

So often, we find it difficult to know what to say or do when someone is grieving. Just as often, people say or do something that is the opposite of help. While there is no playbook for this, there are a few items to keep in mind when you encounter a person with a loss.

What to Avoid

- Cliches. “It was God’s will.” Any sentence that starts with “At least...” “She’s in a better place.” Cliches can be based on inaccurate assumptions or feel simplistic in the time of intense emotion.
- Changing the topic if you feel uneasy. It is a gift to just be present with people.
- Trying to “fix” the pain or feelings of the griever. Avoid suggestions.
- Assuming grief is only present after a death.
- Offering to help and not follow through. If you cannot help now, it’s okay.
- Pressuring a person into doing something, even if you think it could help. The person may not be ready, but just the ask can be comforting. And ask until the person is ready.
- Assuming someone does not want to be bothered. Alone time is necessary for grief processing, but such assumptions can lead to someone feeling neglected or forgotten.
- Allowing griever to be isolated. Share your home, yourself, or a meal.
- Easing away when it gets difficult.
 - If the situation is more than you have the internal resources for (feelings of unease, fear, etc.), find someone willing to help.
- Expect grief to work on a timeframe or in a set pattern, or to mesh with your own experiences and expectation. Grief doesn’t happen that way.
- Insisting a griever “move on” or that a presentation should be hidden (crying) or that a process is somehow wrong (unless it is unhealthy or dangerous of course, then be kind about it.)

How to Help

- ❖ Share your heart. “Joe will be missed.” “My heart hurts for you.” “So very sorry”
- ❖ Listen without judgement or interruption.
- ❖ Understand that everyone grieves in unique and different ways. Accept another’s process even if very unlike from your own.
- ❖ Be willing to talk/listen about the loss when the griever needs to.
- ❖ Assist with a simple task. They may not ask, so offer. “I can pick up the kids from school this week so you can...” “Some of us have organized a meal train.”
- ❖ Suggest a shared activity, a jigsaw puzzle or making a meal. Or better yet, a physical activity such as taking a walk. Movement is good for sleep, the mind and the spirit.
- ❖ Remember the griever in month two and month three. The onslaught of support wanes in the first month, and the griever can feel very alone.
- ❖ Remember holidays and anniversaries. Maybe assist with a memorial activity.
- ❖ Help griever find new activities and friends. Include them in your life.
- ❖ Respond to warning signs for distress: weight changes, increased substance use, depression with suicidal thoughts, prolonged sleep issues, physical problems, poor hygiene. Then lead person toward professional assistance.
- ❖ **Learn all you can about grief.** LCOH Spiritual Care recommends whatsyourgrief.com as a great source of research backed information.
- ❖ **Remember: we all grieve.** If it was important to you and you lost it, you will have grief. So, it’s not just the obvious things like a death, a divorce, a job or career, your health.
 - Good events can cause grief too, such as weddings, a teen moving out of the home, a new job, moving to a new city. These are points of transition.
 - Something such as losing a priceless heirloom or your favorite car of all time, etc., can produce grief.
 - When things change, we must let go of the old situation. Letting go is loss. Loss will have an element of grief.

And remember to be kind to yourself. A time of grief is not easy, and watching loved ones hurting can be troubling. It is easy to make unintended mistakes in your efforts to be of help. If you make a mistake, forgive yourself. Give apologies if necessary. Move forward having learned from the experience.

A final word: Many a chaplain spends time just sitting and being with people. That closeness can be a comfort. Give it a try next time you are at odds with what to do. Your loved one will feel your care.