

What Can You Do for a Person Who is Bereaved?

The following suggestions have been provided by various members of a support group for those wishing to gain understanding of what may and may not be helpful for a bereaved person. Each individual experiences grief in their own way and will have their own unique needs during and after their loss. Bereaved individuals may respond differently to the following suggestions.

1. A card with a list of specific ways of offering assistance (taking their children for an evening, grocery shopping for them). "Please let me know if there is anything I can do" is well intentioned, but places the burden of knowing what to ask for on a person who is already overwhelmed with emotions.
2. Cards and letters with pictures and memories of the loved one.
3. A place for relatives to stay.
4. Transportation to and from the airport for relatives.
5. Assistance in planning and organizing the funeral.
6. Non-perishable food items.
7. List making and record-keeping so thank you notes can be sent.
8. Transportation to a doctor's appointment, grocery store, etc. (Sometimes driving in the first few days or weeks is difficult.)
9. Assistance with errands, housecleaning, raking leaves, shoveling snow, or mowing the lawn, etc. Grieving people often lack energy for these essential tasks.
10. Offer childcare so they can rest without having to worry about the needs and safety of the children.
11. Addressing and stamping envelopes for thank you notes.
12. Be a good listener, if being listened to is what they need and what you are comfortable doing. If you want to be a caring ear for your friends, don't force the issue. Just let them know you will listen.
13. Provide information about support groups if you are aware of them.
14. If you know the person is having trouble sleeping, you might send them some Sleepytime tea, a relaxation tape, or other 'personalized' items in a care package.
15. Call the person from time to time and talk to them about how they are doing in the weeks and months after the funeral.
16. Put aside your own notions about what a grieving person "should" be doing. Everyone grieves in his or her own way. There is no right way to grieve. Be willing to just be there with them and for them without any expectations.
17. Expect that person to have a wide variety of moods.
18. If you know of important dates of the deceased, send a card in remembrance. Birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, and the anniversary of the date of the death are all times that are difficult to get through, especially the first year.
19. There is no need to be original in expressions of condolences. A simple "I'm sorry about your loss" or "I'm thinking of you" works very well.
20. Memorials can be a nice way to commemorate the person who has passed away. Giving to their favorite charity, plaques, or other symbolic representations of what that person was about is a way to solidify their memory and their existence.

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Just as there are things that will be helpful to an individual who is grieving, there will also be things that will not be helpful. All of us who have lost a loved one could probably suggest at least one thing that wasn't helpful, if we remember our own experiences. Again, these are general suggestions and not intended to be viewed as absolute for every individual:

- Avoid saying things like, "It's for the best," "It was God's will," "It was just his time to go," etc. Grieving people are not generally comforted by unsolicited "explanations" for the loss.
- Allow the person to tangle with hurt, angry or confused thoughts and feelings about religion or God without trying to stifle this. It is normal and healthy to re-examine faith, values, and beliefs after losing someone.
- Don't expect the person to hurry and get "back to their old self." Grief changes people. Get to know them as the "new" person they've become if their grief does lead them to become at all different from the person you have known.
- Don't have a pre-determined time line for the person to "get over it". Grief comes and goes over time. Grief can be sparked by any one of the senses and can "reappear" years later.