

# Helping a Grieving Friend

When a grandparent, parent, sibling or friend of a college student dies, it is often the first time that grief and bereavement are experienced in a personal way. The following are some guidelines on how to support a grieving friend.

1. Remember that following a significant death nearly all bereaved persons experience symptoms of exhaustion and apathy; other topics may not seem as important to them as their loss.
2. If you are close to the bereaved person, try to be sensitive and assess the situation. Do they want someone around all the time or need time alone? It is sometimes helpful to have a close friend "directing traffic" of other visitors.
3. Don't try to defend God or offer platitudes, i.e., "Don't cry", "It was God's will", or "They're in a better place".
4. A simple "I'm sorry", "I'm praying for you", or even "I don't know what to say, but I care and hurt for you" is usually sufficient. If you don't know what to say, giving a hug when appropriate is often more than sufficient. Don't be afraid to cry with your friend.
5. Let the bereaved lead the conversation. Especially at first, don't assume the bereaved wants to be distracted with "current" topics.
6. Remember that an appearance of emotional strength is often the combined effect of shock and prayer support. The person who seems strong and in control at the funeral or in the first few weeks afterward needs support just as much as the one who appears distraught.
7. Look for practical things you can do for the bereaved, i.e., offer to shop for an airline ticket, do laundry, make a delivery, make phone calls, etc.
8. After the initial period of grief, don't avoid the subject and leave the bereaved with the impression that you have forgotten them and their tragedy. Even if they cry, they will be glad to find someone who cares.
9. Invite students who have lost a parent to join your family for Parents' Weekend or times when they might feel especially lonely. Be sensitive about special days and think about having their family join yours.

And remember... we're here to talk...

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