

HELP & COMFORT



HOW TO HELP YOUR FRIEND DURING THEIR BEREAVEMENT

A Friend In Need, Needs a Friend Indeed!

When you are coping with your bereavement, relatives, friends and neighbours are often supportive at the time of a death and during the wake and funeral. However, after the funeral, you may wonder what has happened to your friends.

One of the hardest things to cope with is seeing your friend upset. As a result many people try and avoid the subject and say things like 'He wouldn't have wanted to see you crying'.

In reality, most people who are suffering a bereavement want to talk about their loved one and need their friends as a support network. With this in mind I have outlined what I see as the essential elements in helping a friend, neighbour or colleague through a difficult time.

1. Acknowledge the bereaved person's loss. Never ignore the death of someone in the life of a relative, friend, neighbour or colleague. It only adds further distress.
2. Be a good listener – take the initiative and broach the subject first. Your friend will want to talk about their loved one. Going over and over what happened is a normal part of bereavement.
3. Avoid saying 'I know how you feel', or talking about your own bereavements. Even if you have experienced a similar loss, at the moment it is their loss and feelings which are important to them
4. Don't assume anything. Ask them what they would like you to do, but don't treat them like an invalid.
5. If they need time on their own, give them that space. Nobody knows how to grieve, each death is as individual as a birth so make sure you are there as a safety net.
6. Be patient and understanding and encourage them to be patient with themselves.
7. Reassure your friend that they are still capable of carrying out everyday tasks like shopping, but be there if they need you. A death often brings practical problems and people may be grateful for help, but it is usually best to ask first.
8. Be open to ideas. If your friend feels they need counselling or expert help, help them to find it.
9. A letter can let the bereaved person know in a few words that you are sad about their loss and are thinking of them. If you knew the person who has died you could share a memory of them or mention the qualities they had that you valued. It is thoughtful to add 'This letter does not need answering'.
10. Keep in Contact - the effects of losing someone close are usually felt for several months, often years. Bereaved people appreciate being remembered or included at birthdays and celebrations. Anniversaries often reawaken grief, and support at these times can be helpful.
11. Never assume that the bereaved person should have got over their loss by a certain time. Grieving nearly always takes longer than people expect.
12. A good friend is one who is close enough without asking, but knows to keep their distance when necessary.