

Additional Suggestions on How to Comfort Grieving People

The suggestions and the resource list which follow were developed by the staff of Family Life Education for the Diocese of Syracuse, New York, and are reprinted with their kind permission.

Usually friends, relatives and neighbors are supportive at the time of a death and during the wake and funeral time that follows. Food, flowers and physical presence are among the thoughtful expressions. But after the funeral many grieving people wonder where their friends are. In some ways they need support and caring from their friends even more when the reality hits and the long process of grief begins. Ways of helping grieving people are as limitless as your imagination. Listed below are some suggestions:

1. Read about the stages of grief so you can understand and help the bereaved to understand.

2. "I'm sorry" or "I care" is all that is necessary to say — such can be shown by a squeeze of the hand, a kiss, a hug.

3. Don't say, "You will get over it in time." Time will soften the hurt but it will not go away. There will always be a scar.

4. Listen and listen again. Talking about the pain slowly lessens its sting. Most bereaved need to talk. It is helpful for you to listen even if you hear the same things over and over.

5. Don't tell people, "It is God's will." Explanations do not console.

6. The bereaved want to talk about the dead person. Often well-meaning people steer the conversation away from mention of the dead person.

7. Be patient — mourning takes time. People need you, so stand by them for as long as possible. There is no timetable for grief.

8. Talk about the good memories — they help healing.

9. Suggest that grieving people take part in support groups. Sharing similar experiences helps healing.

10. Show caring by helping in practical ways.

11. Sincerely ask, "How are you doing?" The bereaved can tell if you only want to hear "fine" or if you really want to know.

12. Help the bereaved not to have expectations as to how they should feel and when they will be healed.

13. Be approachable, aware and interested.

14. Be accepting of the bereaved, of their feelings, their confusion.

15. Offer acts of thoughtfulness — a note, visit, plant, helpful book, plate of cookies, phone call, an invitation for lunch, dinner, coffee.