

## **SUPPORTING OTHERS DURING BEREAVEMENT**

How do we support and comfort others after they've lost a loved one? Sometimes it's hard to know what to do, but the desire to reach out and care is a good first step. Listed below are some practical suggestions on how to "be there" for those who are grieving.

### **1. GET IN TOUCH**

Telephone or send a note to express your caring and concern. Notes sharing fond memories or warm stories can be read again and again.

### **2. OFFER TO DO PRACTICAL TASKS**

Immediately following a death, suggestions include offering to transport relatives to/from the airport, supplying food, babysitting and offering to stay in the home to greet visitors when the family is unavailable. Later on, tasks such as providing transportation, mailing packages, getting the oil changed in the car or tilling a garden might be appreciated.

### **3. LISTEN**

Grieving persons often need to tell the story of the deceased person's illness and death over and over again. Listening without judgment and interruption is invaluable.

### **4. AVOID CLICHES AND EASY ANSWERS**

A simple "I'm sorry" or "You are in my thoughts and prayers" is more comforting than clichés and answers attempting to ease a person's pain.

### **5. DON'T TRY TO FIX THE PAIN**

Grieving is a painful process, and by allowing others to feel and express that sorrow, healing can begin. We have a tendency to want to "cheer people up," or to avoid being around another's pain. What a gift we can give when we can simply be accepting, caring, and available to those who are hurting.

### **6. EXPECT STRONG, VARYING EMOTIONS**

Disbelief, guilt, anger, sadness, loneliness, and fear are just a few of the many emotions grieving persons experience. Accepting and encouraging expressions of these feelings helps.

## **7. TOUCH**

A simple squeeze of a hand, a hug, or a touch on the arm conveys caring.

## **8. OFFER OPPORTUNITIES TO REMEMBER**

If sharing memories seems to be important and comforting, ask about photographs and encourage reminiscing. Offer to revisit places and people who can add perspective and confirm the importance of the loss.

## **9. ENCOURAGE THE BEREAVED TO ACCESS/DEVELOP THEIR SUPPORT SYSTEMS**

Bereaved persons need to be surrounded by acceptance, kindness, and patience. Encourage them to get involved with people, groups and activities that provide them that support. If you (or the bereaved) have special concerns during their bereavement, encourage them to seek professional help.

## **10. PROVIDE TIMES FOR LIGHTHEARTEDNESS**

Laughter and diversion can sometimes be a welcome relief.

## **11. ENCOURAGE PATIENCE WITH YOURSELF AND THE BEREAVED**

Take care of and support yourself as you reach out to others – take time to restore yourself! Encourage the bereaved not to expect too much from themselves, and not to make any major decisions the first year after the loss.

## **12. STAY IN TOUCH**

Continue to reach out through listening, cards, phone calls, and invitations, particularly 3-13 months after the death. Remember birthdays and other special days throughout the year, as well as the first anniversary of the death.

## **13. BELIEVE IN THE BEREAVED PERSON'S ABILITY TO HEAL AND GROW**

Trusting and hoping for healing and growth encourages it to happen.

## **14. CONTINUE TO LEARN ABOUT THE GRIEF PROCESS**

Ask questions, read, attend seminars, share with others who are interested.