

TO YOUR HEALTH

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How to Help a Grieving Friend

By Marcia Feldman, Palliative Care Coordinator

Have you ever experienced telling a friend or a loved one that you are grieving a loss and their response is to give you advice? Even though our friends may sincerely want to be able to help us feel better, the result of unwanted advice can make something in us close down and stop sharing our upset.

There is a wonderful 4-minute video called, "[How to Help a Grieving Friend](#)" on YouTube that makes this point eloquently. Imagine you have just lost someone tragically and your friends want to cheer you up by saying things like, "*You just need to go out dancing to feel better*" or "*I was sad once and I tried Acupuncture; have you ever tried that?*" Their intention comes from a loving place in their hearts, but it misses the mark of what you may actually need. The video makes the point that what we really need when we're grieving is for someone to just allow us to feel and express what we're going through and be present to us without trying to fix us.



As a loving friend or family member, it can be hard to hold back on giving advice. It is a human instinct to want to offer solutions when we observe someone

in pain, however it can often be more effective to simply listen with a compassionate ear and hold their pain without judgement or the need to fix it. This can be easier said than done, but if we give advice and sense that they are shutting down or unable to take it in, then we don't get what we want either—which is to be helpful.

Do's and Don'ts about how to be there for a grieving friend:

- 1. Listen and be present to whatever they are feeling**—It's not your job to judge or try to fix their pain. As a friend, you are simply there to hear them, validate their grief and be present. Be empathetic. Be willing to initiate the conversation or sit in silence; whatever they need.
- 2. Check in regularly**—Instead of saying, "*Let me know if you need anything,*" say instead, "*I'm going to call you to check in from time to time if that's ok.*" Then follow through with making yourself available. Anticipate that they may need extra support around the funeral or special occasions like birthdays, anniversaries and holidays. Reach out at these times and be prepared to be there for them.
- 3. Offer practical, concrete support**—You could bring a meal, offer help with making funeral arrangements, do their laundry or take out the trash. These tangible efforts could be very needed and appreciated if they are immobilized by grief and they might be reticent to ask for this kind of help. Be proactive and offer the help so they don't have to ask for it.
- 4. Be willing to talk about the person that has died**—There is a period in the beginning of losing a loved one when the grieving person may need to ruminate on that person. The way to truly be there for them is to listen and talk about the deceased rather than avoiding the subject.

5. Encourage them to get help from a professional.

The grieving friend may be battling with depression that could be helped in a therapeutic relationship with a grief counselor or mental health therapist. This role is different than that of a friend.

6. Remain open to different religious beliefs.

What happens after we die is one of the great mysteries in life, and what we each individually believe about that varies from person to person. Rather than assuming that they share our beliefs or proselytizing, we can instead be a listening ear for their beliefs.

7. Resist the urge to avoid the person.

If we are uncomfortable with knowing what to say or do, it may be easier to avoid the grieving friend or any discussion of the deceased. Stay present and continue checking in. Remember that a friend can offer unconditional love and support just by listening and holding the emotions of their friend.

**8. Refrain from using the word "should".**

With the knowledge that grief takes its own time for each person, have patience and avoid telling them what you think they "should" do. Every person's journey through grief is different and what might work for you may not be what they need.

Keep in mind that there is no right or wrong way to grieve. Grief is a natural response to loss and it is not always linear. Men and women can often grieve in different ways depending on societal conditioning. In general, a person that grieves in a masculine way may be more inclined to turn inward, be less likely to cry and choose physical activity for release. A feminine way of grieving may be to talk through their feelings and seek support to process it.

However people work through their grief, it may fluctuate between ups and downs. The key to supporting a grieving friend is to be present to their needs, and validate their experience.

<https://www.choosingtherapy.com/how-to-help-a-grieving-friend/>

<https://together.stjude.org/en-us/emotional-support-daily-life/bereavement/gender-differences-in-grieving.html>

The Heart of the Matter

By Maeve Lobo, LICSW

We are all too familiar with the sobering statistic: heart disease remains the leading cause of death in the United States. Nearly 650,000 Americans die from heart disease each year, and roughly 11 percent of the population is diagnosed annually.

Heart disease is a broad term that refers specifically to disorders of the heart's structure and function. While all heart disease falls under the umbrella of cardiovascular disease, the reverse is not true—not all cardiovascular disease involves heart disease. The distinction is subtle, and the terms are often used interchangeably, adding to the confusion.

The most common form of heart disease is coronary heart disease. It occurs when fat, cholesterol, calcium, and other substances found in the blood accumulate along the walls of the coronary arteries, forming plaque. This build up restricts blood flow and reduces the amount of oxygen reaching the heart, often resulting in chest pain, known medically as angina. Plaque can also rupture, leading to blood clots that may completely block blood flow and trigger a heart attack.

The good news is that many forms of heart disease are preventable. Key steps include:

- Monitoring blood pressure
- Checking A1C levels
- Managing cholesterol
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Avoiding smoking
- Staying physically active

Small, consistent choices can make a meaningful difference—often long before symptoms appear.

To promote heart health, wear red on the first Friday in February - 2/6
Source : NIH

