

How to Help a Friend in Grief

From *What To Do When the Police Leave* by Bill Jenkins

As much as we would like to avoid unpleasantness in our lives, sometimes it is inescapable. Instead, we must learn how to grieve in healthy ways and work through our difficulties. If you are wondering what you can do to help a friend who is in intense mourning, here are some suggestions:

- Recognize that everyone grieves at their own pace. Some progress rather quickly, some move very slowly. We never move at the speed that others think we should. Help us take one day at a time.
- Keep us company and be there for us. You don't need to say anything profound or do anything earthshaking. Often, your greatest help is your quiet presence and simplest deeds.
- Make suggestions and initiate contact and activities. It is important for you to respect our privacy and give us some time alone, but we also may not have the energy to structure our lives right after a traumatic loss. We may have to rely on others to think of things that we don't know to ask for.
- Provide a safe environment for us to show strong emotions. It may be very painful, but it can be of enormous help.
- Help us remember good things. Tell us your memories of our loved one as you listen to us tell you ours. If we begin to show our emotions outwardly, you have not upset us, you have simply enabled us to be a bit more open in your presence.
- Be there after the first wave is over. Make the effort to call, to come by, to help us out six months and even a year down the road. Crowds may be difficult for us. Shopping and holidays will be overwhelming. Offer your help. If we're not up to a visit we'll let you know, but let us know you remember and are there for us.
- Listen to us. We need to tell our story over and over in order to process our grief. We may even say outrageous things. Don't judge us by what we say or how we feel. We have a lot to work through, and in time, we will come to the answers that are right for us.
- Be careful of clichés, religious platitudes, or easy answers. You may not be able to help us with certain issues right now, so don't be too quick to share your opinions if we say something you don't agree with. We need time to work things out on our own.
- Be sensitive to our needs, be patient, have confidence and believe in us. We will get better, we will experience healing; but it will take some time, and it can be rough going for much of the way.
- Be on the look-out for destructive behaviors. Traumatic loss can lead some people into depression, alcohol or drug abuse. We may need you to keep an eye on us while things are especially tough.
- Help us find humorous diversion. Laughter is good medicine.
- Be willing to do difficult things with us. We may need someone to sit with us in court; we may need a safe place to rage; we may need help with the funeral or afterwards. There may be some hard times ahead and facing them alone can be terrifying.
- Help us find ways to bring good things out of the bad. It is important that our loved one be remembered and memorialized.
- Find out about grief. Read some of the books that are available. The more you know, the better able

you will be to help us.

- Help us to find support and inspiration. Often, a poem or song will speak to us in ways that no one else can. Also, talking to someone who has survived a similar loss can help us realize that we are not alone in our grief.

We have to go through this valley in order to get to the other side. Dealing with grief cannot be avoided. Help us get through this as well as we are able. Your true friendship and companionship, your kindness and patience can help us get our lives back together.

We will experience some level of grief over our loved one's loss *for the rest of our lives*. Some days will simply be better than others. One day, we hope to reach a point where our good days outnumber the bad. That will be a major milestone for us.

Thank you for being here for us.