

What to say to someone who is grieving

Someone you know is grieving. Perhaps you've sent a message or some flowers. Or you've attended the funeral. You know that when you see them next or give them a call, you want to say the right thing.

Do I bring up the subject?
 What if I put my foot in it?
 What if I upset them?

It's natural to be anxious. Most of us aren't well-practised in talking about grief. We've grown up in a society that says: *Big boys don't cry. Be brave. Be strong. Keep your feelings to yourself.* But these statements aren't actually helpful. Here are some do's and don'ts to guide you:

- DO say something to acknowledge the loss. Friends may disappoint and add to the grief when they don't know how to make an approach. Avoidance hurts.
- DO say the name of the person who's died - whispering their name or completely leaving it out of the conversation is another type of avoidance.
- DON'T try to say something to minimise the loss. You don't have to 'fix it' by saying something that you think will cheer them up. Don't change the subject to get their mind off it.
- DO ask how things are going. A word of caution though. If you ask a grieving person, "How are you?" they might just reply "Fine thanks" out of habit. Or they might not be sure you really are asking how they are coping. Try asking like this:

How are things at home these days?
 How are you managing on your own?
 It's been about a month since the funeral, how are you doing?

- DO let them cry. Try not to let your embarrassment or awkwardness stop their tears. Crying is normal.
- DON'T tell them to suppress their guilt or anger. Being angry, guilty or feeling responsible in some way are not uncommon. We don't need to snap them out of it or tell them to stop thinking this way. It's best to let them share these feelings and show you understand.
- DO let them ask why? Grieving involves a search for meaning and answers. Your role is to allow the questions to surface. You don't need to have a logical answer or reply "It's God's will". Answers will eventually surface - even if the answer is "there is no answer".
- DO remember your friend on significant days like Christmas, birthdays, anniversaries, and family celebrations. It can be very hard to put on a happy face when everyone else is celebrating and you're feeling sad and lonely because someone in your life is missing.
- DON'T avoid grieving people because you think there's nothing you can offer to help them. You can help just by turning up, being there and showing your friend that it's alright to talk to you if they want to.

Adapted from:
 "Stuck for Words – What to say to someone who is grieving"
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