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WAYS TO SAY "I CARE"

The things we say and do help us express our support, concern, and love. Our words and actions can also become obstacles for someone who is hurting. Supporting a grieving person is not always intuitive because everyone grieves differently. When we don't feel helpful or become unsure of ourselves, we often keep our distance, making it worse. Here are 10 tips for the simple act of providing support.

1 DON'T TRY TO FIX OR LESSEN THE PAIN

Take the pressure off; there is nothing you can do to fix this. There are no words, actions, or formulaic strategies for making grief better. However, there is a lot you can do to help someone live through and endure grief, especially the incredibly difficult days. Understand and accept that grief is hard work and your consistent presence is what matters.

2 LISTEN WITHOUT INTERRUPTION

Grief produces a variety of complex and contradictory feelings. Create space for them to share intimately, at length, and repetitiously. See our tips sheet on [communication](#) for more helpful tips on this.

3 SCHEDULE REGULAR VISITS OR PHONE CALLS

Consistency is the foundation of saying "I care." Life is busy, so establish a routine. Add a reminder on your calendar to call. Schedule a regular coffee/tea date. Check in. Be present. Keep showing up (for like, a long time).

4 SEND TEXTS OFTEN

You never know when your text will land at the right moment. You don't need to text an inspirational quote or some cliché to try and make things better. Start with "I'm thinking of you right now" or "how are you doing today?"

5 HAVE NO EXPECTATIONS

This. Is. Not. About. You. If you can understand this basic premise then you will be more open to whatever comes your way. Maybe you will see anger, despair, aloofness, ungraciousness, or snark. No matter what you do or how much you show up, expect nothing in return. When you leave your self-worth or image at the door, you are more helpful and effective. You may bust your butt and get nothing in return, not even a thank you. That's okay. Grief is a foggy, unpredictable mess, so keep your expectations in check.

6 HELP MANAGE THE TO-DO LIST

Sometimes "doing" can be helpful. But, even when grieving, people and families can be fussy. So, don't just start washing someone's clothes and filling the fridge. Help with the to-do list, but ask how they like it done.

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7 FOOD & FLOWERS

Sometimes food and flowers are comforting. Sometimes they are repulsive. Grief changes appetites. Ask yourself, would you want to eat lasagna for the next 90 days, or care for a room full of roses? No one does. Ask what the person or family actually needs and likes to eat. Be considerate of allergies etc., and then follow through. Gift cards to restaurants (especially places where take out is an option) are an easy way to meet a need.

8 CHILD CARE

If there are children, babysitting is a huge help. Even if the parent(s) are home, knowing that they don't need to take care of a child's needs for a few hours is a temporary relief. Be sure to know the child's needs, what scares and comforts them because of the loss, and go slow by following their lead.

9 SHARE MEMORIES OR ASK ABOUT THE PERSON WHO DIED

Just because talking about or sharing memories of the person who died may be hard or painful, silence is often more painful. If you have memories of the person who died then share them often. If you didn't know the person, ask questions about their life, their joys, hobbies, friends, history, childhood, etc.

10 ENCOURAGE

We all need a cheerleader at times. Encouragement is not advice, clichés, or inspirational quotes from social media. Encouragement helps someone put one foot in front of the other. Sometimes, people need help just getting out of bed and eating. Acknowledge even the simplest of tasks that took courage or grit to do. These small things can feel like climbing a mountain.

11 BONUS TIP: TALK TO THE PERSON!

Avoiding someone who is grieving, pretending like they are okay, ignoring their grief or changing the subject, always makes it worse. Include the person in activities (even if they've turned you down 1,000 times), talk to the person about their day, and ask how *that* day is going so far. Be open to the variety of emotions that will present themselves, and know that people need joy and sorrow, laughter and tears.