



Is There Anything I Can Do?

*Supporting a Friend
Who Is Grieving*

“I can’t even imagine what they’re going through...”

Being a friend to someone whose loved one has died is difficult.

Unless you have had someone close to you die as well, it’s hard to imagine what your friend is experiencing.

How can I help?

Many times, friends want to help, but they’re not sure what to do, or even what to say. They end up feeling helpless, and then avoiding their friend because they feel uncomfortable, not knowing what to do.



What Does a Grieving Person Feel?

If one of your friends has experienced the death of someone they love, here are a few things that can be helpful for you to know about what they might be going through:

- **A Swirl of Emotions**—When someone who is loved dies, a person often feels many different feelings—sadness, anger, relief, confusion, and many more.... Your friend may feel sad one day and angry the next, or scared and then alone and then full of guilt one after the other throughout a single day, or even sad and relieved at the same time.
- **They Want to Remember**—Talking about the person who died can be comforting—even if your friend cries as they do it.
- **Drained of Energy**—When a person is grieving, usually their energy level is lower than normal.
- **They Need Support**—It does matter if you go to the funeral service, even if you don’t know what to say—your presence can mean a great deal. If it’s past the time of the funeral, your presence in their life can still make a big difference.
- **Feelings That Last**—The feelings of grief will come and go for your friend for a long time—usually longer than you expect.
- **Many Layers of Complexity**—Besides missing the person who died, your friend is surrounded by others whom he or she loves and who are grieving too—adding to his or her confusion and sadness.

“What Should I Say?”

We often hear from grieving children and teens (and adults too) that after someone close to them has died, their friends will avoid them or treat them differently.

Friends of those who are grieving have told us that, after the death, they don't know how to treat their friend because they don't want to make things worse or to make them cry. Instead of taking the risk of saying or doing the wrong thing, they don't say or do anything at all.

But remember, what you say or do isn't as important as just being there for your friend. It's difficult—but it can make a big difference in how they feel.

Since it's hard to know what to say, we have put together a list of some things that are helpful to say, as well as some things that are better left unsaid.

“A real friend is one who walks in when the rest of the world walks out.”

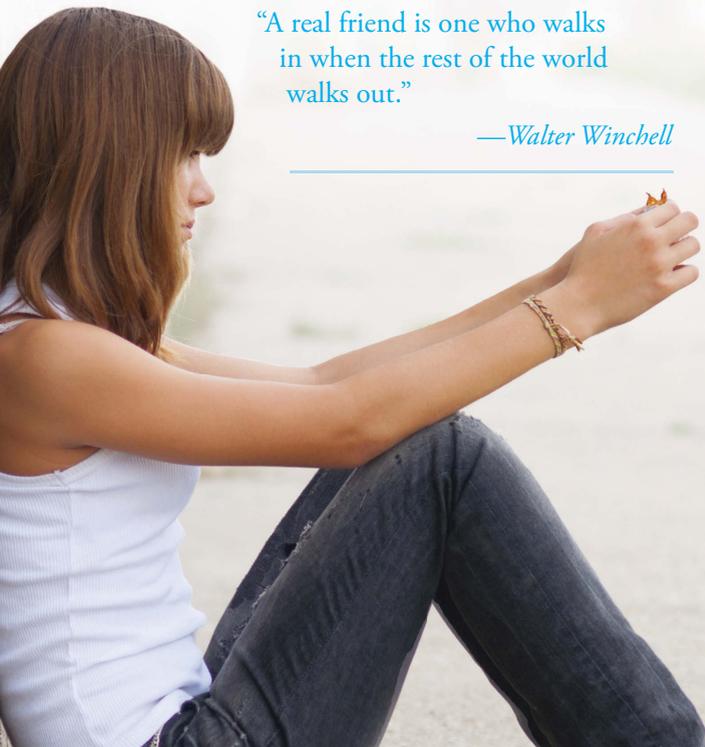
—Walter Winchell

Do Say:

- “I'm sad to hear that your dad died.”
- “If you want to talk about what happened, I'm here to listen.”
- “Tell me about _____.”
(The person who died—and use their name.)
- “I can't imagine how hard this must be for you.”
- “I don't know what to say, but I want you to know I'm here if you need a friend.”

Avoid Saying:

- “I know how you feel!” (Because everyone grieves differently, and because the feelings are so big and shift so suddenly, it's hard to really know what someone else is feeling.)
- “I'm sorry.” (Although we mean to express our sorrow, these words sound like an apology. We haven't done anything wrong, so there's no need to feel sorry.)
- “You shouldn't feel that way.” (Feelings are neither right nor wrong—and can't just be turned off even if someone wants to.)
- Any cliché like: “Time heals all wounds.” “He's in a better place.” “You'll be OK.” (These kind of clichés sound dismissive to a grieving person, as if their real feelings aren't valid.)
- “Try not to think about it.” (Your friend can't help thinking about the person they love. They don't want to forget that person.)
- “Be positive.” (When the worst thing you can think of has happened to you, it's hard to be positive.)
- “It's time to put it behind you.” (This absence in their life will never be behind them. They will hopefully learn to live with their grief, but it's part of their life now.)



“How Can I Answer Their Questions?”

Having a loved one die is one of life’s most devastating experiences.

Your friend will feel broken-hearted. Their feelings of sadness may be very intense at times. The absence of their loved one—this new hole inside them—will touch many areas of their life. They may feel like their whole world has been turned upside down.

Your friend may have many confusing thoughts, and questions like these:

- **Why did this happen to me?**
- **Was it my fault?**
- **Could I have done something to stop them from dying?**
- **How am I going to live my life without my loved one?**

If you hear your friend ask one of these questions, you don’t need to feel like you have to answer them. These questions are normal, but they don’t really have any specific answers.

When we see someone we care about feeling sad or angry over what has happened to them, because we care about them, it’s natural to want to make them feel better. What we have learned from the grieving families who have come to the Caring Place is there really isn’t anything that anybody can do to “fix” what they are going through.

What they are really looking for from their friends is someone to listen to them and to be OK with them if they feel down or sad.

What is most important to remember is that they don’t expect you to answer questions, or even to understand—they just hope that you will care.

“What Should I Do?”

In addition to not knowing what to say to a grieving friend, it’s also difficult to know what to do to help them.

Remember, there is no way to make your friend “better,” but there are things you can do that may be helpful to them as they grieve. And the most important is to be there.

Be There.

Be there to listen if they want to talk about the person who died.

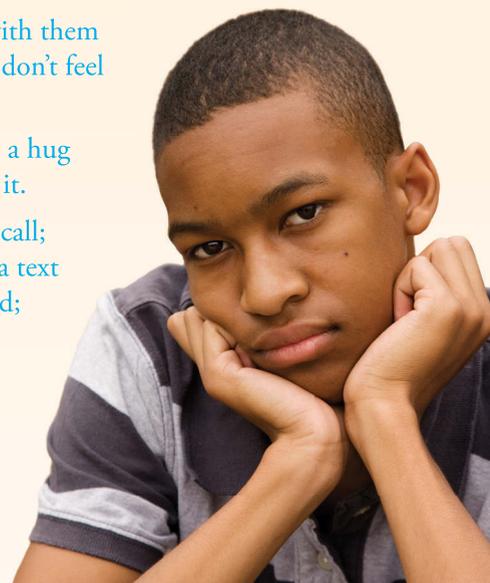
Be there to sit with them even when they don’t feel like talking.

Be there to offer a hug when they need it.

Be there—visit; call; send an e-mail, a text message or a card; invite them somewhere.

Be there and just be yourself.

Be There.



“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.”

—Leo Buscaglia

About the Highmark Caring Place

The Highmark Caring Place is dedicated to making a difference in the lives of grieving children.

It is the mission of the Highmark Caring Place:

- To raise awareness of the needs of grieving children
- To provide programs to address those needs
- To equip the community to support those children who have experienced the death of a loved one



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