

# TWELVE WAYS TO HELP A GRIEVING FRIEND



Nineteenth century poet, Emily Dickinson wrote simply, "My friends are my estate." Now that a friend is dealing with a loved one's death, in a poignant way, you are part of their "estate," and what you do can have immeasurable impact on their life. Consider these ideas as you seek ways to help your friend in grief...

**Be there.** Worry less about the words you will say and concentrate more on being present, even in silence. Hurting people don't usually remember very long the words we say, but they never forget the fact that we came.

**Send a note.** Share a memory of a special time or remind a grieving friend of an enduring character quality of his or her loved one. A few sentences written on a note or card can be read over and over again; your friend will cherish this warm expression of comfort.

**Attend the funeral.** Do everything possible to get to the service. Even if you did not know the loved one, your presence communicates concern and care to the family members you do know.



**Offer caring words but not explanations.**

When death comes tragically, many people want to offer reasons or explanations,

often with a spiritual twist ("Well, it's just God's will.") Instead, express your care and concern and remind your friend simply, "I am here for you."

**Entertain the kids.** If your friend has children, offer to take them out for an afternoon. Go bowling, play miniature golf, see a movie, grab a burger or visit an ice cream parlor. A few hours of respite for a parent who is grieving can be a great gift, indeed.

**Connect your friend.** You might know professionals in the community who can help with the tasks your friend now faces. Attorneys, trust officers, accountants and trustworthy craftsmen like plumbers and mechanics are important. Share your contacts willingly.

**Listen but avoid giving advice.** Early grief can be an overwhelming time. Listen and ask questions but be very careful about dispensing advice. Because every relationship is unique, no two losses are exactly the same and there is no "one size fits all" advice.

**Help with a specific task.** Instead of saying, "Let me know if I can help," make a specific offer to help. "Can I help you clean out his closet?" or "How about I go to the grocery store for you" will be received gratefully. One group surprised their newly-bereaved friend by cleaning her home while family members went to make arrangements for the funeral.

**Call as special days approach.** You won't remind your friend of their loss by calling; it is already very much on their mind! Letting her know a week or two in advance that she is in your thoughts can be a very meaningful gesture. Put anniversaries, birthdays and holidays on your calendar and acknowledge special days. Don't forget anticipated events, either—like the due date of a baby, an expected retirement and high school graduation.

**Plan an outing together.** Especially a few months after the death, grief can become intensely lonely. Since many people quit calling in a few weeks, plan an outing to a movie, picnic, theater performance or sporting event together. If he or she declines your invitation, invite to another event at a later time.

**Include your friend in your plans.** If your friend has little local connection with family, invite him or her to join your family for holiday gatherings. Everyone feels better after such a caring gesture.

**Help find resources.** Bereavement support groups, reading materials and web resources can all be meaningful to bereaved people. Just remember there isn't much ability to concentrate in early grief, so most books will be hard for newly bereaved people to read.