

5 Simple Ways to Help Someone Who's Grieving



Feeling helpless about how to help a friend or family member who's mourning a loss? Small acts can speak volumes.

In fact, just being there for the grieving person without having to be asked can be a valuable show of support. Yvonne Heath, author, public speaker and founder of the “I Just Showed Up” campaign, advocates this approach for anyone looking to comfort a loved one in mourning.

“Call, text, hug listen, walk their dog, bring coffee, cry together,” Heath advises [on her website](#). “You can make a positive difference. Lead with your heart.”

Here's how to help someone who's grieving, in simple, thoughtful ways:

1. Listen.

There's no need to rush in with words of comfort, especially if they don't come naturally.

Better: Simply make a space, with your companionable silence, for the bereaved to express herself if she chooses.

2. Don't hurry an emotional moment.

A common impulse when someone gets choked up with grief is to change the subject and try to shift to safer emotional ground.

Better: See the moment through. Pause. Offer a hug. Share your own comment about the person who died, if it feels appropriate.

3. Talk about the person who died.

Don't avoid mentioning the person who died; he or she is still very much in the minds of grieving family and friends.

Better: Reminisce or mention how the person inspired you or made you happy. When they naturally come to mind, don't be afraid to say things like, "Wouldn't Susan have loved these flowers?" or, "I can just hear Bill saying, 'It's a great day for golf!'"

4. Stick to honesty over platitudes.

There's no "right" thing to say to a survivor, but there are plenty of wrong things.

Better: If you're tongue-tied, acknowledge it. Try, "I don't know what to say. Please know I'm thinking about you." Or, "I can't imagine what each day is like for you now. I'm here for you."

5. Don't ask how you can help; just do.

Asking even simple questions ("Do you want me to pick up milk for you?" "What do you like to eat?") puts an added burden on the bereaved. Especially soon after a death, someone who's mourning may be physically and emotionally incapable of such decision making.

Better: Simply step in when you see a need: Furnish a meal (ready to eat or freeze, in disposable containers that don't need to be returned), organize regular meal delivery, pick up milk or eggs or fresh bread when you're at the store and leave them in a cooler on the porch, mow the lawn, take care of the carpool, stop by to walk and feed the dog. Think of essential tasks that can be handled unobtrusively.

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