

When a Friend is Grieving...

Do:

- Be a good listener. Be genuine.
- Lend a hand when you can, without being intrusive.
- Expect emotional ups and downs (sometimes sudden).
- Recognize that after the loss of someone close, it feels like things might never be the same for that person.
- Expect a shift in the person's perspective. What was important and meaningful before may seem trivial now.
- Be willing to agree with the person that this is a terrible event, that it's not fair, that it's desperately sad.
- Check to see how the person is, even weeks after the loss (that's exactly the time when most other people stop asking).
- Allow the grieving person to share even angry or guilty feelings with you. Those are normal feelings and need to be expressed. Not challenging them does not mean you agree; it means that you are available to listen non-judgmentally.
- Expect some changes in how the person relates to you. They may be more distant or more needy, or alternate between these. Tolerate this as best you can.
- Recognize that when you care about someone who has experienced a loss, it is painful and hard on you, too. It can bring up some of your own feelings of loss, as well. Take care of yourself!

Avoid:

- Avoid making any assumptions about how the person will feel, behave, or what they will need from you. Be available and open to what is needed.
- Avoid expecting the person to return to "normal" on any kind of timeline or schedule.
- Avoid expecting the person to follow any pre-conceived models for bereavement. Everyone's grief is unique.
- Avoid blanket 'comforting' statements (e.g., "time heals all wounds," "everything happens for a reason"), as these can feel dismissive and condescending.
- Avoid taking it personally if your efforts at comfort are rejected or don't seem to help. Consider asking what the person might need, instead.
- Avoid "skirting around" the issue of the loss because you think it will make the person too sad if you ask about it or say you're sorry. They're thinking about it already and might really appreciate the gesture.