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GUIDELINES FOR SUPPORTING THOSE GRIEVING

- Be understanding without claiming to “know” how the grieving person is feeling
- Allow the person to express their feelings, including anger and bitterness. Be careful not to force them to reveal feelings they are not ready to share.
- Refrain from telling stories of your own past losses since this can sometimes serve to diminish or dismiss the grieving person’s pain.
- Let them know (by actions not only by your words) that you will continue to be there for them after other friends and family have gone back to their routines. Sometimes people keep their distance because they do not know what to say or do. It is typically when the dinners stop being sent over and the visits slow down that the harsh reality sets in.
- Throughout the year, remember birthdays, anniversaries and special days that have important meaning for the bereaved, and offer your continued support at these times Acknowledging such occasions can be very meaningful to the bereaved when so many tend to allow the day to pass unnoticed.
- Physical touch is a great comfort and when it seems appropriate, reach out to those who are grieving with a hug or a touch.
- Don’t compare his or her grief with anyone else’s. Grief is a very individual process, even when the relationship to the deceased may be the same.
- Don’t tell them to “get over it.” We don’t “get over” loss, we learn to live with it.
- Avoid setting a time line for grief. We are impatient with those who are grieving because it is difficult for us tolerate their sadness. Allow them the time to heal and learn how to tolerate their feelings and be present with them.
- Don’t say, “If you need something, call me.” Be creative and show random acts of kindness. Help with household chores, assist with children, help them to take time for themselves, and offer your company.
- Be a good listener. Listening is what grieving people are often short on. Few people want to talk about grief, or mention their lost loved one. Grieving people want to talk about their loved one—they want to remember, share stories and learn from others things they may not have known. It helps to keep their spirit part of the present. While at times it may seem painful, it is also healing.
- Be sensitive to their feelings. Listen and try not to give advice. You can’t fix it this so don’t try. Know that your ability to listen is a powerful gift.
- Support their decision to seek professional help. Offer to assist them in finding a referral, and if necessary, assist with transportation or accompany them to their first appointment.
- Be patient and give them time. Don’t take it personally when they turn down an invitation. While they need your friendship, sometimes they need to be alone in their grief.