

When someone near you is grieving
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Often it can be awkward when an acquaintance is grieving a serious loss. Just as when someone in your family or a close friend is enduring a stressful time, you would like to react in some helpful way. Yet this person is a coworker or neighbor with whom you don't have a close relationship.

You honestly care. And you know that you would like to be consoled if you were enduring a sudden death in the family, a loved one's extended hospital stay, or a contentious divorce. But the difficulty comes in when you are not in the acquaintance's close circle of friends and family and maybe haven't experienced similar losses in your own life.

Though you are personally unaffected, you can be an encouragement to your acquaintance without seeming insensitive. The truth is that even without being a close friend, your display of concern may go a long way. Here are a few tips to ease the apprehension:

Be specific with your offers to help. A person disoriented by grief may not know how to respond to an offer like, "If there's anything I can do, please let me know." Besides, even if he has an idea of how you could help, he probably won't take the initiative to tell you. "What would you think if I take care of the kids while you get some fresh air" and "Let me bring you guys dinner on Wednesday" would be much more valuable.

In the case of a death, make time to attend the visitation. Even if you stop by for only a few minutes, people generally welcome the presence of as many faces as will appear and always remember and appreciate the gesture. If visitors are welcome during a hospital stay, go and visit.

Be willing to listen if the person is willing to share. Don't feel like you have to offer profound wisdom or platitudes. Mostly this is a time when the grieving person needs to work through her own emotions, not get problems solved. You may want to say something simple like, "I heard about your loss and I'm sorry" and let him take it from there. Don't be afraid to be silent.

Monitor your own emotions when someone nearby is suffering. If you feel overly anxious or uncomfortable, it may be that you have your own grief from the past that could be resolved. Find someone you can talk to or seek professional assistance. Gaining resolution on your own experiences will put you in a better place to comfort others.

Suggest other avenues where she can get additional help if needed. You may know someone who has gone through a similar trial who would permit to you to give out his phone number or e-mail address. Recommend community agencies, crisis lines, or support groups that you know of. In the long run, passing resource information on can be just as valuable as giving advice.

Most importantly, remember that each person goes through hard times differently. Remain available to support and encourage as the genuine opportunity arises. You may not play a primary role in your friend's social network, but you can still be caring and helpful.