

CARING FOR OTHERS

GRIEF AND LOSS

Supporting a grieving person can be stressful. Helpers need to attend to themselves while assisting the grieving person. Since helpers themselves are often grieving, they may need to address their own healing process.

HELPING SOMEONE WHO IS GRIEVING

- Allow the person to be sad - you don't need to "make them happy." It's okay to let them be. Keep in mind that their emotions will fluctuate, sometimes quickly - and that's okay, too.
- Be available. Allow the person time so there is no sense of urgency when you visit or talk. Silence is okay. It is okay to sit with someone.
- Be a good listener. Accept the words and feelings expressed, avoid being judgmental or taking their feelings personally. Avoid telling them what they feel or what they should do. Don't change the subject - let them change it when they are ready.
- Don't minimize the loss and avoid giving easy answers or cliches (e.g., "You must be strong"; "You have to get on with your life"; "It's good that he/she didn't have to suffer"; etc.).
- Don't be afraid to talk about the loss or the person.
- Allow the bereaved person to grieve for as long or short a time as needed. Be patient.
- Take some kind of action. Make a phone call, send a card, give a hug, attend the funeral, help with practical matters (e.g., meals, care of children, etc.). Invite them to do things with you - but be supportive of their decision if they decline.
- Encourage the bereaved to care for themselves. They need to attend to physical needs, postpone major decisions, and allow themselves to grieve and to recover.
- Acknowledge and accept your own limitations. Many situations can be hard to handle, but can be made easier with the help of other resources (like friends, professionals, etc).
- Avoid misconceptions regarding the grieving and healing process, such as the ideas that it may be inappropriate to show emotions except at a funeral/service, that the recovery process should be complete within a prescribed time frame, etc.