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## Don't Say These 8 Things to a Grieving Person



Even though death happens all the time, people often find themselves in a difficult position when confronted with a grieving friend, family member, co-worker or acquaintance. The loss of a loved one can be crushing, taking over someone's life in ways that they did not expect. It's not surprising for them to need to take a step back for a while, or find new ways to move about the world.

**The way that people around them react to the situation can have a significant effect. Although most people mean well, they sometimes say things that don't convey their love and support. In some cases, statements can be actively harmful, hurting relationships for the long-term. By considering the impact of these problematic statements, it's easier to know what to avoid.**

### 1. "Everything happens for a reason."

People who are grieving often have a lot of questions without answers. They may want to know why their loved one died at that particular time. Even if the death was something they have been anticipating for months or years, they may still feel like the event leaves a lot of unfinished business in its wake. Saying that everything happens for a reason might seem like it shows sympathy for these feelings, but it doesn't. Rather, it shifts the emphasis off of the grieving process, into a place of pointing fingers or assigning blame.

It's tempting to retroactively construct a manageable cause and effect for the events, but it's not helpful. People who aren't connected to the deceased person enough to know the factors surrounding their death aren't entitled to the details. Instead, it's more useful to make space for people as they make their way through grief.

## 2. "She's in a better place."

The death of a loved one is a common time for families and friend groups to realize that what they thought were shared views are actually not shared at all. It's never a good idea to presume how someone conceives of the afterlife. Even people who go to religious services every week might not believe everything they hear or read while they are there.

More than that, focusing on the afterlife or a better place actively erases the person's experience. It implies that they are unreasonably sad or that grief is unnecessary, since the loved one is not really gone. But in truth, the loss of a loved one is still a loss, regardless of what happens after death. If it's necessary to relate the grief in a religious sense, as people might do while attending a funeral service, it's better to offer to pray or participate in a religious rite instead.

## 3. "It's a part of life."

When people interact with someone who is grieving, they may feel tempted to contain the situation in a neat box. The trouble is that grief over the loss of a loved one is messy. It's complicated. Even a death that was utterly predictable and expected could still be a shock when it actually happens.

The cyclical nature of life can be incredibly brutal, especially in the moment. People don't forget that death exists, and so they don't need to be reminded of it at the worst possible time. Instead, it's better to offer to sit with someone if they want support, particularly during a visit to their home. In many cases, people need someone to listen to them talk, rather than trying to process their feelings for them.

## 4. "If you need anything, just ask."

The urge to help a grieving person is a good one, but sometimes the offer comes at a cost. Many people try to help out with a situation because they don't know what else to do and they want to feel like they are

doing something. People who are coping with loss might not have the time or energy to assign tasks to others whom they do not know very well. They may have a list of chores and other responsibilities that are piling up, but feel unsure how to tackle them.

When offering help, well-meaning friends and acquaintances should make sure that they are providing assistance for the right reasons. It's a good idea to check in and confirm that the assistance is needed, wanted, and provided at the right time. Choosing a concrete task with a defined beginning and ending is better than an open-ended offer that requires negotiation. For example, it is fairly easy to offer to do specific chores or errands, like driving the kids to soccer practice, folding laundry or grocery shopping.

## 5. "You are so strong, you can get through this."

Talking about a grieving person's strength is often intended to be inspiring and complimentary, but it may not feel that way. Most people who are going through the loss of a loved one are well aware that polite society would like them to move on as quickly as possible. They may sense a great deal of pressure to put a brave face on the situation, or to mask their emotions to make others feel more comfortable.

People aren't required to look or act a certain way when grieving, but praising them for a lack of visible emotion isn't necessarily a compliment. Rather, it can seem like an evaluation of the person's ability to hold it together, as if they're being judged by everyone around them. It can feel incredibly isolating. Instead, it's better to listen rather than talking, and reassure them that it's perfectly all right to be how they are right now.

## 6. "He wouldn't have wanted you to be sad."

Losing a loved one often feels like a massive, gaping hole in life where that person used to be. People may try to fill that gap, but they usually don't do a very good job. Although this statement may be intended as a way to honor the person who died or help a grieving person remain positive, it's not. It's actively misrepresenting love as a means to control the way that people express emotion.

Assigning motives and feelings to the person who passed can be a minefield of hurtful statements and inaccurate representation. It is not actually possible to know how a person would have wanted their loved ones to feel or act after they die. Those who were close friends and family might be able to share relevant stories or things that they knew. "He always talked about how much he valued your friendship" is a better way to honor the connection.

## 7. "You'll have other opportunities."

Life is a cycle where many loved ones will come and go. Bringing this up during a period of grief can sound like people are expected to just move on to the next relationship. Encouraging people to think of

the next steps tends to be focused on particular kinds of grief, such as the loss of a partner, child or pet. But the loss of a loved one isn't like misplacing a sweater or even losing a job. Finding another spouse, having another child or getting another pet doesn't erase the experience.

One of the things that grieving people worry about most is that others will forget. They may not want to feel consumed by memories that no one else shares anymore. As such, it can be very helpful to them to hear that their loved one will not be forgotten. Remembering a birthday, favorite holiday or another important occasion could be a wonderful way to help keep those memories alive, even years later.

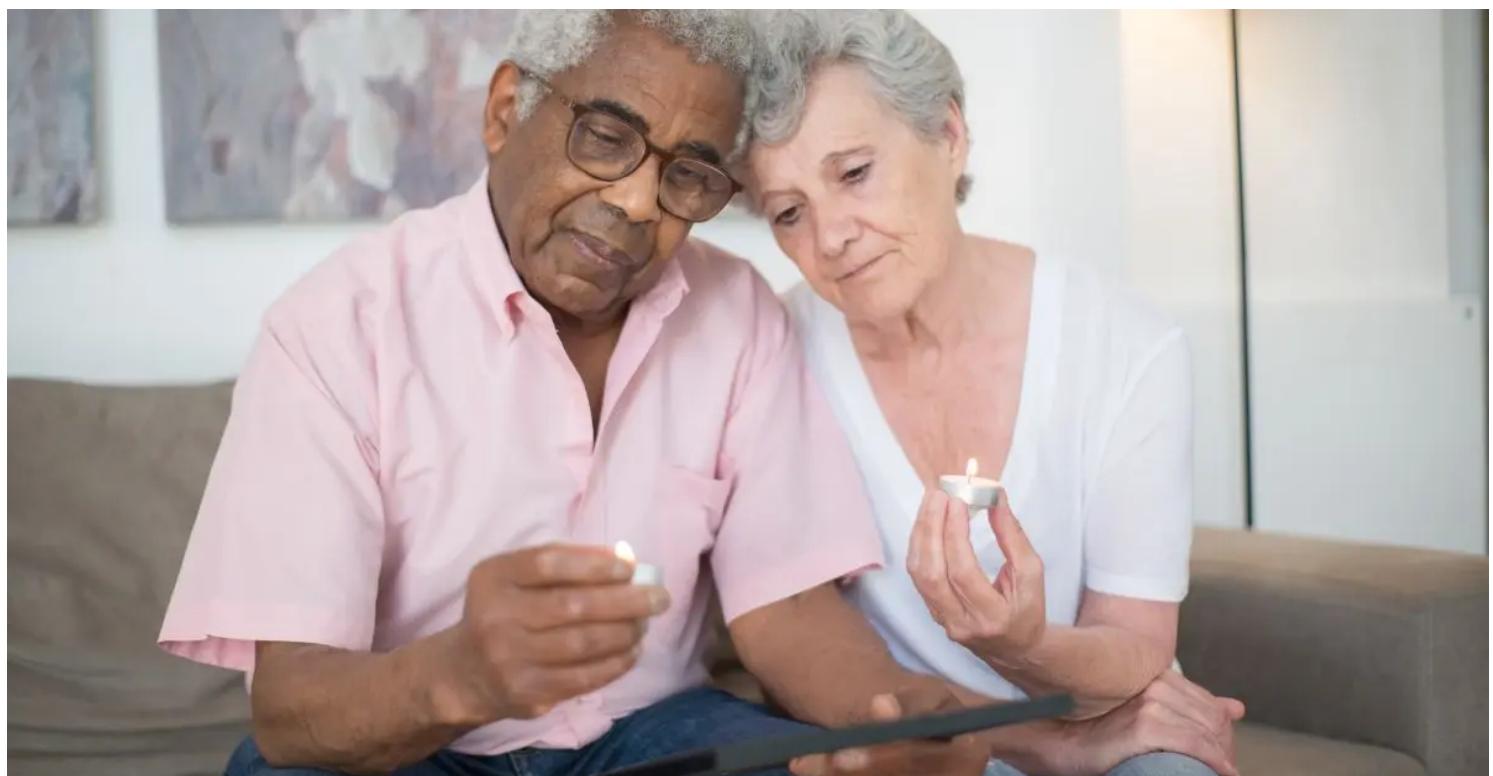
## 8. "Don't you think this has gone on long enough?"

It's common to see grief in the context of a funeral or during a visit to a family that is grieving the loss of a loved one. Outside of that context, it's tempting to try to encourage people to push past their grief and move on. Experts say that grief looks very different from one person to the next, and there isn't one form that is better than another. It's perfectly natural to struggle to get back to normal activities.

Grieving people may already feel like they don't have enough space to handle their loved one's final affairs, much less attend to their own needs. In a work setting, it's better to give them space to adjust over time. Reaching out in a positive, respectful manner is ideal. It's not unreasonable to ask a close friend or family member if they need extra support in the form of counseling or other services. But those suggestions should never come in the form of implying that it's abnormal or unacceptable for them to grieve as long as they have.

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## How to Show Sympathy to a Grieving Person



Many friends and acquaintances want to show sympathy in the form of a gift. There are many things that people can give, including:

- Handwritten cards
- Flowers

- Plants or trees
- Personalized gifts
- Plush toys, particularly for children
- Gift cards for services or food delivery

Many people say that they receive an overwhelming amount of attention right after the loss of a loved one, with a long period of no contact following.

It's hard to know what to say to someone who is grieving, particularly once the funeral, burial or memorial service is done. But people often say that this is the time they needed support the most, as the rest of the world keeps moving. It's a good time to continue to reach out, particularly for people who lost a member of their household. Helping to organize support for families who are coping with a loss of income can make it easier for them to adjust.

Although most people think to send gifts shortly after the death, it's important to remember them at other times of the year. Sending personalized sympathy gifts on a holiday or first anniversary can remind a grieving person that they aren't alone in the process. For example, at In The Light Urns we offer a variety of Christmas ornaments with photographs and custom engraving. Our Crystal Memory 3D boxes come in a variety of shapes, with a custom engraved picture and a beautiful light base.

In the rush to provide some kind of help or support to a grieving loved one, many people end up saying or doing the wrong thing. While declining to offer support out of fear of making a mistake can also cause problems, it's not surprising that many people hold back for this reason. Of course, there's a lot of room between saying nothing and saying something unintentionally hurtful. By avoiding these common statements and following the suggestions for alternatives, people can better ensure that the support they give to those who are grieving is received as intended.

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