How Can You Help?
College Students and Grief

1) Let the person know they can talk to you about their loss. Ask open-ended questions that require more than a “yes or “no” answer. You can say things like:
Tell me about your mom.
When did you first meet Mary?
What is your favorite memory of your sister.

It is okay to ask about the day the person died and the funeral. You might say, “How did you get the news that your brother had been killed in a car accident?” or “What do you remember about the funeral service?”

2) Actively listen by paraphrasing and reflecting back what you have heard. This lets the person know that you are really listening, that you care and it encourages them to continue talking.

3) Avoid clichés such as, “She has gone to a better place” or “It was God’s will”. Statements such as these may be true, but do not make the person feel any better or as though you understand what they are going through.

4) Tell them it’s okay to cry. Keep Kleenex handy. You may need it yourself!

5) Help them find ways to memorialize their loved one. You might suggest a memory scrapbook or planting a tree.

6) If you know the date of death or other significant dates consider sending a card or making a phone call to let the person know you are thinking of them on this special day.

7) Remember that your task is to get the person to talk, not to “fix” things nor to make them feel better.

If you have concerns about a friend or family member do not hesitate to contact the Student Counseling Center. Counselors are available to answer questions and offer support.

Student Counseling Center
320 Student Union
405-744-5472

University Counseling Services
A Division of Student Affairs
Oklahoma State University
HOW TO HELP SOMEONE WHO IS GRIEVING

Be available. Let someone know that you are there for them. Allow them time and space to talk and process the loss at their own pace. Avoid telling stories of your own losses.

Ask about the person who died. It is helpful to share memories and come to realize that this person will not be easily forgotten.

Be a good listener. Listening to a person who is grieving is extremely important. They may need to tell the story of their loss over and over to help them accept the reality of what has happened. If they are not ready to talk, respect this wish.

Avoid clichés. Statements such as “He is in a better place now,” “Time will heal,” or “This was all part of God's plan” are not helpful and take away the person’s right to feel sad and mourn their loss.

Focus on validating statements that encourage the person to talk. “Sounds like your mother was an amazing person” works better than “I remember when my mother died”.

Offer specific help such as buying groceries, providing a meal on Tuesday, babysitting for a night, or driving someone to an appointment. A statement such as “Call me if you need anything” is too broad because people who are grieving often can’t identify what they need from others.

It is okay to not have all the answers. What mourners need most is support, love, and a non-judgmental person to talk to when they are ready.

Grief is a unique process impacted by many factors including one’s culture, coping style, personality, and life history.

Signs that someone may benefit from professional assistance can include:
--Thoughts of suicide or self-harm
--Prolonged sadness or depressed mood
--Withdrawal from social interactions with peers or family; Frequent absences from work or school
--Increased alcohol or substance use
--Excessive feelings of guilt, hopelessness, worthlessness

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