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## **UNDERSTAND GRIEF TO BETTER OFFER YOUR SYMPATHIES**

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Do you find that you avoid people who have had a death in the family? Do you feel awkward when you are around them? Maybe you trip over your words or say something and immediately think how dumb it sounded.

One of the reasons it is so hard for people to know what to say is that they aren't familiar with grief in the same way. They may not have lost someone close to them so they aren't sure what words would make the person feel better or worse. When you take the time to understand the grieving process, it makes it easier to know what to say.

### **Grief Happens in Many Ways**

No two people grieve the same way. One person may cry a lot while another may seem stoic. A mother with young children often has to pretend that everything is fine even when it isn't. Just because a person doesn't act the way you would expect doesn't mean that they aren't grieving.

Don't be oversensitive. Don't spend time analyzing your every word to figure out how the other person will react. Most of the time, the bereaved person appreciates the sentiment even if the words don't come out the right way.

Be prepared for intense and extreme emotions. Don't assume that what you say is the cause. The person is feeling all kinds of emotions and they can vary from one moment to the next. While something may trigger a change in emotion, sometimes it just happens. Unless you are intentionally cruel, what you say is not going to make the person feel worse.

### **When Silence is Golden**

Sometimes a person's presence is all the comfort that is needed. Just sitting in silence can let the other person know that he or she is not alone. This is especially true for the first few days after someone's death. The family may receive numerous expressions of sympathy and just appreciate the quiet companionship.

Physical contact can speak volumes, sometimes even more than words. A hug if you are close to the bereaved or even a pat on the arm or squeeze of a hand lets them know what you can't say in words. It's a gentle reminder that they are not alone even though they may feel like it.

## **A Listening Ear**

Sometimes the person who needs to do the talking is not you. The grieving family member may need to talk about his or her feelings and your job is just to listen. Offering a shoulder to cry on and an ear to listen can be the best way to offer your sympathies in many cases.

You may hear stories about the deceased or other random thoughts many times. You don't need to feel like you have to respond other than to show that you are listening. For the other person, the healing comes through talking.

Understand how grief works in different people so that you can offer the right message of sympathy to a grieving loved one.