How to Support Someone Who is Grieving

It can be tough to know what to say or do when someone you care about is grieving. It’s common to feel helpless, awkward, or unsure. You may be afraid of intruding, saying the wrong thing, or making the person feel even worse. Or maybe you feel there’s little you can do to make things better. While you can’t take away the pain of the loss, you can provide much-needed comfort and support. There are many ways to help a grieving friend or family member, starting with letting the person know you care. The following are some additional tips for supporting someone who is grieving:

- **Acknowledge the situation.** For example, “I heard that your ____ died.” Use the word “died.” This will show that you are more open to talking about how the person really feels.

- **Express your concern.** For example, “I’m sorry to hear that this happened to you.”

- **Be genuine** in your communication and don’t hide your feelings. For example, “I’m not sure what to say, but I want you to know I care.”

- **Offer your support.** For example, “Tell me what I can do for you.”

- **Ask how he or she feels.** Don’t assume you know how the bereaved person feels on any given day.

Although you may have the best of intentions, there are several comments that are best avoided when addressing someone who has just lost a loved one. These comments include:

- **Don’t say “I know how you feel.”** One can never know how another may feel. You could, instead, ask your friend to tell you how he or she feels.

- **Don’t say “It’s part of God’s plan.”** This phrase can make people angry and they often respond with, “What plan? Nobody told me about any plan.”

- **Don’t say “Look at what you have to be thankful for.”** They know they have things to be thankful for, but right now they are not important.

- **Don’t say “He’s/She’s in a better place now.”** The bereaved may or may not believe this. Keep your beliefs to yourself unless asked.

- **Don’t say “This is behind you now; it’s time to get on with your life.”** Sometimes the bereaved are resistant to getting on with life because they feel this means “forgetting” their loved one. In addition, moving on is easier said than done. Grief has a mind of its own and works at its own pace.

- **Don’t use statements that begin with “You should” or “You will.”** These statements are too directive. Instead you could begin your comments with: “Have you thought about…” or “You might…”