



## GRIEF/LOSS, PART 2

Grief/Loss, Part 1 was written for those who are grieving and was printed in the September, 2009, Silver Lining. Part 2 is focused on how to help grieving people soon after their loss. We want to follow the example of Jesus as he shared compassion. Mark 1:41: *"And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand..."* Jesus moved toward the people--reaching out to them. Matthew 20:34: *"So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched..."* Jesus physically touched them. Luke 7:13: *"And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said..."* Jesus spoke to her.

Follow Jesus' example in your first encounter . . . Go to the family. Reach out and touch them—shake hands, touch their shoulder, or give them a hug--if it is appropriate. Speak in love. If you can't find the right words such as, "I know how special he/she was to you," or "I wish I could take the hurt away," you may simply say, "I'm sorry." Another way of saying, "I'm sorry," is, "You have my sympathy." Avoid clichés such as: "Everything happens for a reason," "It was meant to be," or "God would never give you more than you could handle." Clichés tend to minimize the loss. What may seem comforting to you may be very hurtful to the grieving person. If you are unaware of what to say, simply say, "I don't know what to say." Honesty can be more comforting than words with less meaning. Sometimes there is just nothing to say. Just be quiet, be with them, and hold their hands. If you do say something insensitive, acknowledge it and apologize. These comments can cause hurt and future resentment. Instead, be a source of comfort by listening, sharing a memory, and laughing or crying together.

If you are a close family member or friend, it may be helpful if you ask to help maintain laundry, basic housecleaning or cooking, or watch children at home. Other routine duties such as returning library books, buying groceries, picking up dry cleaning, transporting to appointments or activities, etc., may also be appreciated. Try to anticipate what your friend may need. Bereaved persons sometimes can't think of what is needed.

Some ideas for helping those going through grief and loss include: sending plants/flowers, giving to a charity in the loved one's name, sending sympathy cards (include money if you know there is a need), writing special remembrances of the loved one, making short phone calls to them (don't worry about being a bother; let your friend tell you if he/she doesn't want to talk right now), and making and bringing dinner (try to use disposable containers, or clearly label containers you want returned, and be responsible for getting your container within a reasonable time).

In the first few weeks after a loss, continue your visits with them. Give your friend permission to grieve in front of you. Don't change the subject or tell them not to cry, and do not act uncomfortable when they do cry. Ask questions, but don't tell them how they should feel. Say sincerely, "Tell me how you are getting along," and be ready to listen. They may have a lot to say and may repeat their story many times. In order to be helpful to their grieving process, you must be willing to listen. Sometimes grieving people can verbalize what they need, so you know what you can do or say to comfort them. You can also add, "I've been thinking of you," or "I've

been praying for you.” Helpers need to be aware that people who are grieving also need times of NOT talking about grief.

Saying, “Call me if you need anything,” or “Let me know how I can help,” are generic statements for grieving families. Not all people are willing to ask for help. Instead, offer to take them out for dinner at a specific time that is convenient for them. Or state that you are getting your groceries Thursday morning. “May I have your grocery list to get your groceries at the same time?” Or “I’m putting through a load of laundry, do you have a basket or two that I can take home and do for you?” If the answers are “no,” offer these again, or other suggestions, in a week or two.

Avoid giving advice. Everyone is an individual and grieves differently. There are no rules that define how a bereaved person should feel or how soon he/she will return to the routine of daily life. You may want the bereaved person to “get back to normal” in about a month, but depending on the type of loss, that may not be realistic thinking. Accept listening to stories patiently over and over; this is an important part of the grieving process.

After a few weeks, people generally stop coming by. Continue to call and check in with the grieving person or family. Make a call, leave a message, or write a note to let them know you care. Answering machines and e-mail are great ways to keep in touch allowing the bereaved person to respond only when he/she feels up to it. Invite bereaved friends to attend events with you, as you normally would. Let them decide if they don’t want to attend.

II Corinthians 1:3-4: *“Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.”* If you experienced death in your immediate family, you now have an opportunity to share your feelings and encouraging words of comfort. Now you may understand a purpose for the trial of grief you went through. Maybe there are several of you who have gone through similar situations. This would be a good time to visit the grieving person together. After listening to his/her words of loss, share your own and offer hope. Gently encourage grieving people to help them realize that they can adjust to a new way of living without their loved ones. Don’t just do this one time. Invite the grieving person to do something with you away from his/her home—when he/she is ready. Until then, go for short visits (in small groups or alone) and share special songs, scripture, poems, and stories that may help. Grieving people often attach with others who have gone through grief.

Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you as you endeavor to follow Jesus’ pattern of demonstrating compassion to the grieving soon after their loss.

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Many thoughts and ideas were taken from pamphlets printed by National SHARE Office, St. Joseph Health Center, 300 First Capitol Drive, St. Charles, MO, 62201-2893 and from the book, Tear Soup, by Schwiebert and DeKlyen.

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