

What can I do to help the family/loved ones of the deceased?

The first few months following a death are a time when grieving friends and relatives need you most. Let them know that your support did not end with the funeral.

While talking to someone in a state of grief can be uncomfortable, don't let discomfort prevent you from reaching out. You might not know exactly what to say or what to do, but that's okay; you don't need to have answers or give advice. While you can't take away the pain of the loss, you *can* give much-needed comfort and support just by keeping in touch and listening when they want to talk.

It's difficult for many grieving people to ask for help. They might feel guilty about receiving so much attention, or may be too depressed to ask for help. You can make it easier for them by making specific suggestion such as, "I'm going shopping this afternoon. Do you need anything?" or "I've made stew for dinner. I'd like to drop by and bring you some. Would that be okay?"

There are many other practical ways you might be able to help, such as:

- Filling out forms or making phone calls
- Helping clean out their loved one's closet
- Running errands
- Driving them to an appointment
- Taking them for a walk
- Inviting them to lunch or a movie
- Spending time together doing a fun activity (card game, puzzle, art project)

You can also give an open invitation by saying, "Let me know what I can do," which may make a grieving person feel more comfortable about asking for help. Be careful not to be pushy; allow them to decide what's best for them. Never pressure someone into an activity for which they don't feel ready.

In the weeks and months after the loss, you may feel you should avoid using the name of the deceased so you don't cause any more sadness. This is not necessary; family and friends need to know their loved one is still remembered. By mentioning the name, you'll let them know they're on your mind too, and create an opening if they want to talk.

Be aware that certain events and days of the year, like holidays, birthdays and anniversaries, can be very difficult, so be sensitive to these times. Let the person know you are aware of the special day and that you're thinking of them. Ask whether they'd like company, or prefer to be alone. It's thoughtful acts like this that let them know they're not alone.

The pain of losing someone close never goes away, but the love and support of friends and family can make it more bearable and even help them move on.