

Stuck For Words

Doris Zagdanski

Fact Sheet 3

Published April 2010

What to say to someone who is grieving - Your guide to the do's and don'ts

- **DO say something to acknowledge the loss.** Friends may disappoint and add to the grief when they don't know how to make an approach. Avoidance hurts.
- **DO say their name.** Whispering the name of the person who's died or completely leaving it out of the conversation is another type of avoidance.
- **DON'T try to say something to minimise the loss.** You don't have to fix it by saying something that you think will cheer them up. Don't change the subject to get their mind off it.
- **DO ask how things are going.** A word of caution though. If you ask a grieving person, "How are you?" they might just reply "Fine thanks" out of habit. Or they might not be sure you really are asking how they are coping. Try asking like this:
 - How are things at home these days?*
 - How are you managing on your own?*
 - It's been about a month since the funeral, how are things going?*
- **DO let them cry.** Try not to let your embarrassment or awkwardness stop their tears.
- **DON'T tell them to suppress their guilt or anger.** Being angry, guilty or feeling responsible in some way are a common part of grief. We don't need to snap them out of it or tell them to stop thinking this way. It's best to let them share these feelings and show you understand.
- **DO let them ask WHY?** Grieving involves a search for meaning and answers. Your role is to allow the questions to surface. You don't need to have a logical answer or reply "It's God's will". Answers will eventually surface - even if the answer is "there is no answer".
- **DO remember them on significant days** like Christmas, birthdays, anniversaries, and family celebrations. It can be very hard to put on a happy face when everyone else is celebrating and you're feeling sad and lonely because someone in your life is missing.
- **DON'T avoid grieving people** because you think there's nothing you can offer to help them. You can help with a squeeze of the hand, an arm around their shoulder. You can help by showing them that it's alright to talk to you if they want to.