



Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

How to help the grieving

Several months ago, a dear friend of mine lost her husband. As multitudes of people flocked to lift her family up and help in their time of need, I reached out to a mom who had lost her spouse years ago to see if she had advice on how to help a grieving friend.

It turned out she did. She had excellent advice, in fact, and because grief is relevant to all of our lives, I'd like to share her wisdom.

Here's some food for thought on how to help a friend who has lost their loved one:

▶ **Remember you can't fix things.** When tragedy strikes, we all want to help. We rally around our friend and want to *do something*. Although there are things we can do, we can't fix what has permanently changed in their life.

When God says He is the "God of all comfort," this is a deep, rich truth. All true and healing comfort comes from Him. While God may use you to administer some of His comfort, it originates in Him.

The best thing you can do for a grieving friend is study your Bible and get to know God better. As you minister love and grieve with your friend, point him or her to the Heavenly Father.

▶ **Don't judge.** There's *no wrong way* to grieve a sudden loss. Whatever keeps the person breathing is fine. Don't allow your feelings to be hurt by a grieving friend, either; it's your gift to them to overlook anything they might say or do, or not say or do.

The period after a death is not about your friendship; it's about letting your friend circle the wagons around their family and try to survive. It's overwhelming, so let him or her focus energy on keeping themselves and their children upright.

▶ **Have compassion and be very sensitive, but don't pity a friend who is mourning.** While pity is discouraging, compassion instills courage.

Pity says, "Oh, you poor thing. This is so terrible for you and your sweet children. What can I do for you?"

Compassion says, "I'm so sorry this has happened. I can't imagine what you're going through. I'm right here with you, every step of the way."

Compassion operates from the truth that your friend can do all things through Christ who strengthens him or her.

▶ **When you cry for your friend, do it at home.** Don't burden your friend with your tears and anguish. Don't make him or her comfort you. It's okay to shed some tears when your friend is crying, but leave the sobbing breakdowns to them.

▶ **As time goes on, let your friend tell you how badly it hurts.** Don't argue or tell them they have so much to be grateful for when all they can feel is their loss. Certainly they'll need to count their blessings and practice gratitude, but scripture is full of moments where people (David, Job, Jeremiah, Jesus) cry out and tell God how

hard life is. God doesn't correct them; He only reminds them that He is present, He is sovereign and He is love. Offer a safe place where your friend can share his or her rawest emotions and thoughts.

▶ **When you offer help, make it specific.** Don't say "call me if you need anything." Say, "We'd love to have you and the kids to grill out Saturday night."

▶ **Be respectful of your friend's need to handle the loss his or her own way. He or she is walking in uncharted territory, and you don't know how he or she feels.** Offering uninformed or unsolicited advice can be hurtful. It's more helpful for them to hear statements like, "I can't imagine what you are going through, but I can see that God is with you."

▶ **Extend invitations, especially on weekends and holidays, because they can be brutal.** It's fine if your friend says no, but keep inviting them. Do this for years to come because it is an ongoing need.

▶ **Show your friend how you remember their loved one.** Text a picture when you see something that reminds you of them (i.e. his or her favorite strawberry cake) or share a thought that comes to mind. It helps them to know how the person lives on in your memories, too.

▶ **As time goes on, let your friend be a friend to you, too. There will be a day when they feel the need to give back.** Don't treat them as if they're made of glass and can't handle being a friend. It's healing for them to help you.

▶ **Remember that grieving is a long, slow process. Life will never be "normal" again.** There is a new "normal," and over time it will be good. But just because your friend is getting dressed in the morning, going to exercise and shopping for softball cleats doesn't mean he or she is "over it" or "moving on." Be patient as your friend relearns how to live life. Remember that the loss will hit over and over, often in unexpected moments.

▶ **A grieving person needs their friends desperately. They need the comfort of their Savior even more.**

Much more can be written on this subject, but this list is a starting point. Above all, approach your friend from a place of love and pray for guidance. Listen for God's voice and once you receive direction, ask God to use you as a vessel of his love, grace, mercy and compassion.

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