

What Grieving People Want You to Know

By Virginia A. Simpson, Ph.D

1. **I am not strong.** I'm just numb. When you tell me I am strong, I feel that you don't see me.

2. **I will not recover.** This is not a cold or the flu. I'm not sick. I'm grieving and that's different. I will not always be grieving as intensely, but I will never forget my loved one and rather than recover, I want to incorporate his life and love into the rest of my life. That person is part of me and always will be, and sometimes I will remember him with joy and other times with a tear. Both are okay.

3. **I don't have to accept the death.** Yes, I have to understand that it has happened and it is real, but there are just some things in life that are not acceptable.

4. **Please don't avoid me.** You can't catch my grief. My world is painful, and when you are too afraid to call me or visit or say anything, you isolate me at a time when I most need to be cared about. If you don't know what to say, just come over, give me a hug or touch my arm, and gently say, "I'm sorry." You can even say, "I just don't know what to say, but I care, and want you to know that."

5. **Please don't say, "Call me if you need anything."** I'll never call you because I have no idea what I need. Trying to figure out what you could do for me takes more energy than I have. So, in advance, let me give you some ideas:

(a) Bring food.

(b) Offer to take my children to a movie or game so that I have some moments to myself.

(c) Send me a card on special holidays, birthdays (mine, his or hers), or the anniversary of the death, and be sure and mention her name. You can't

make me cry. The tears are here and I will love you for giving me the opportunity to shed them because someone cared enough about me to reach out on this difficult day.

(d) Ask me more than once to join you at a movie or lunch or dinner. I may say no at first or even for a while, but please don't give up on me because somewhere down the line, I may be ready, and if you've given up, then I really will be alone.

6. Try to understand that this is like I'm in a foreign country where I don't speak the language and have no map to tell me what to do. Even if there were a map, I'm not sure right now I could understand what it was saying. I'm lost and in a fog. I'm confused.

7. When you tell me what I should be doing, then I feel even more lost and alone. I feel bad enough that my loved one is dead, so please don't make it worse by telling me I'm not doing this right.

8. Please don't call to complain about your husband, your wife, or your children. Right now, I'd be delighted to have my loved one here no matter what they were doing.

9. Please don't tell me I can have other children or need to start dating again. I'm not ready. And maybe I don't want to. And besides, what makes you think people are replaceable? They aren't. Whoever comes after, will always be someone different.

10. I don't even understand what you mean when you say, "You've got to get on with your life." My life is going on, but it may not look the way you think it should. This will take time and I never will be my old self again. So please, just love me as I am today, and know, that with your love and support, the joy will slowly return to my life. But I will never forget and there will always be times that I cry.

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