

Living Through Loss Counselling Society of BC

Do's and Don'ts When Talking to a Griever

In our desire to comfort someone we know and love when they are in the deep pain of grief, we are often at a loss to know what to say. Yet, we desperately want to be of some comfort and to feel useful. Too often, our best intentions produce the very result that we are trying to avoid and we end up saying something that the griever bears as insensitive. Sometimes, without thinking, we say things that are intended to shut others' pain down because it is making *us* uncomfortable. Below is a list of comments that tend to offend grievers and ideas for how to convey our concern more effectively.

DON'Ts

"Be Strong" cliches.

"Big boys don't cry"

"Children are flexible, you will bounce back"

"You must be strong for your children/spouse, etc."

"You've got to get a hold of yourself"

"She/he is holding up so well"

"Cheer up"

"No sense crying over something you can't change"

"This is nature's way"

"Hurry Up" Cliches

"You're just not your old self"

"Out of sight, out of mind"

Say Instead

"Don't be embarrassed to cry; it is important to let your pain out"

"I bet you'll miss your (brother, sister, etc.) Would you like to talk about him/her?"

"It's only natural that you're struggling; why not share that pain with your children so they can understand and learn healthy grief habits?"

"Of course you're upset I will accept you in whatever space you're in"

"Let your feelings out; Don't feel that you have to be strong for me"

"The loss of your loved one must make you very unhappy and you have a right to be"

"You may need to shed a lot of tears over this and these tears will be good for you"

"I'm sure that this is terribly upsetting; it isn't fair when we lose our hopes and dreams for the future"

"I can only imagine how an experience like this would change a person"

"You must miss your loved one very much; Would you like to talk about him/her?"

Adapted from Lium, Eric, **I Know Just How You Feel, Avoiding the Cliches of Grief**, The Publisher's Mark, Nevada, 1986

Do's and Don'ts When Talking to a Griever

“Time will heal”

“You must be in a lot of pain; it is important to give yourself as much time as you need”

“You're young and you will be able to make a new life for yourself”

“I know you will miss your loved one and the life that you could have had together”

“You should be over this by now”

“I know it will take a long time for you to work through this and I will help you as much as I can”

“Life goes on”

“Life has dealt you a terrible blow; it will be hard for you in the months ahead to live with this pain”

“No sense dwelling on the past”

“Your loved one was important to you. Would you like to share some of your memories?”

“Guilt” Cliches:

“If you look around, there are lots of people worse off than you”

“Your pain is real and cannot be compared to someone else's”

“Count your blessings”

“Your pain is as real as the good things in your life are; this is not going to be easy to adjust to”

“Maybe if you'd had more faith, this wouldn't have happened”

“I don't know why this happened' sometimes life can feel very unfair”

“Think of all your precious memories”

“I know that memories are a poor substitute for having your loved one with you but I hope they will be of some comfort”

“It's a blessing that the suffering is over”

“I am sorry that this ever had to happen and that your loved one had to suffer so much”

“God” Cliches

“God needs him/her more than you do”

“I know you needed this person and are feeling a great sense of loss”

“He/she is happier now because they are with God”

“You made his/her life on earth so happy; it was a gift of love that you can feel good about”

“It was God's will”

“You are good person and this is a terrible, unfair tragedy to have to go through”

“God never gives us more than we can handle”

“This must seem like more pain than anyone could bear; try to deal with it a little at a time”

Do's and Don'ts When Talking to a Griever

“God helps those who help themselves”

“You do not have to go through this alone; I know you are doing the best you can and I am here to help you in whatever way you need”

“Discount” Cliches

I know just how you feel”

“I cannot begin to know how you feel because I have never had this happen to me. I do not know how to tell you how awful I feel about your loss”

“Silence is golden”

“How are you coping since the loss of your loved one? Tell me what you find to be the most difficult adjustments?”

“If there is anything I can do, just call me”

“I will call you tomorrow (or in a few days) to see if there is anything you need; please let me know”

“You can have more children / another spouse etc.”

“I know you will miss this loved one and no one will ever be able to take his/her place”

“It's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all”

“I know your pain must seem unbearable at times because you loved him/her so much”

“Be glad you don't have problems like mine”

“Your loss is unique and your pain is your own to bear”

“What you don't know, won't hurt you”

“You will need information in order to fully understand your loss; what would you like to know about what happen?”