What do I say to someone who has suffered a loss and is experiencing grief? How do I offer condolences? What should I refrain from saying?

There are so many questions that come from encounters with those who are grieving. At these difficult times the desire to help can be strong but we are not always sure of the "right" thing to say. When encountering that person who is has suffered grief or loss here are some replies that can add comfort and condolence.

What to say:

“I am sorry for your loss”

“I am so sorry”

A hug, embrace or touch may help to reduce the pain they are suffering. You may want to relay a story about the deceased if the situation or environment is appropriate. At the funeral would be the perfect time to relay a story, comment or some words of condolence. When the grieved are attending some other social function use your judgment with talking about the deceased. Take your cues from them.

If the bereaved bring up the name of the departed this can be an indication they are willing to talk and share memories about the person. You might follow with - ”Mike used to love coming to the symphony.”

However, if the bereaved mentions “This is so painful” it would indicate that feelings of loss and grief are still on the surface and you may want to wait to bring the deceased one up in

conversation.

Saying nothing more can be an appropriate option. Saying too much may hinder and hurt so learn when to continue and when to just reflect quiet.

If you want to offer to help it is best to have suggestions and ideas ready.

“I am so sorry. I would like to help with grocery shopping/house cleaning/watching the kids. I will call you in a day or two to find out the best times.” This lets them know that they will hear from you and that help is both available and on the way.

Some comments and types of language may hinder, hurt or bind.

Grief and Loss is one of the most personal experiences that one can have. While it is natural to feel empathy for those who are suffering, to transpose ones feelings or to anticipate a reply when speaking to someone who is grieving may be suppressing for the grieving individual. Making assumptions for the grieving not only leaves them confused but also hinders their ability to process and move on.

What not to say:

“You can have other children” (in the instance of a loss of a child)

“It is God’s will”

“God does not give us more than we can bear”

“You are not ready for that yet”

"I know just how you feel"

"Did he have life insurance?"

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