

## **TEN WAYS TO EXPRESS YOUR**

### **SYMPATHY**

*People who are newly bereaved are frequently too shocked and numb to tell friends and family what they need. The following are ways you can show you care:*

- 1. **Look for an immediate need and fill it.** The first few days are filled with a great many things you can do. Offer to answer the telephone and call those who need to be notified. Meet incoming relatives at the airport, train or bus depot. Offer a spare room to an overnight visitor. Provide transportation as needed. If there are children in the family, offer to baby-sit or take them out while funeral arrangements are being made. Arrange with the family to stay at the funeral home when a host is needed.*
- 2. **Be there when needed.** Offer to drive the person to the market or bank - do errands for the person.*
- 3. **Provide food.***
- 4. **Send flowers or donate to a favorite charity.***
- 5. **Reach out and touch.** It's amazing how much a simple hug or kiss can communicate when words fail.*
- 6. **Listen.** Listening can be one of the best ways to help a person work through feelings of grief. Most people's initial reaction to the death of a loved one is shock (even if the death was anticipated). Unexpressed grief can lead to depression. So listening without judgement or trying to "fix" things is a great help.*
- 7. **Send a note or make a phone call.** You need not say a lot - a simple "Remember you are loved" says volumes.*
- 8. **Encourage the bereaved to get out of the house.** It's a kindness to offer an outing for lunch or dinner.*
- 9. **Give of your talent and experience.***
- 10. **Help in the days ahead.** Too often a person who has lost a loved one is surrounded by relatives and friends for a week or so, then the house is empty. Keep in touch!*

## **PRINCIPLES FOR HELPING THE**

### **BEREAVED**

- 1. Avoid platitudes.** Statements like “It’s God’s will.” are tempting, but trivialize the reality the bereaved person is experiencing.
- 2. Don’t “push the river”.** Each person grieves in their own unique way. Allow for the time and manner of each individual.
- 3. Consistency.** Consistent presence and availability over the long haul is best, but be careful not to “smother” the bereaved. Remember dates with a note or call.
- 4. Be willing to reveal your feelings.** This is not necessarily the same as sharing about your own losses. Invite the person to share how they are feeling and tell stories about their loved one. If you knew the deceased, share your memories and feelings.
- 5. Know what normal grieving is.** There are many expressions of grieving: anger, guilt, depression, searching, crying, loss of appetite and sleep. Sometimes even hallucinations! The bereaved may worry they are “going insane”. But unless these expressions are too intense or protracted, it is considered to be normal. Very little or no grieving is considered a danger sign.
- 6. Help to actualize the loss.** Mention the dead person’s name when appropriate. Allow the bereaved to speak and to cry as often as he/she needs. Create and participate in helpful ritual.
- 7. Identify feelings of anger and guilt.** Anger is an uncomfortable feeling for many people - even though it is a normal part of the grieving process. Affirm it’s expression when it occurs. Guilt can be a normal part of coping with a relationship that has ended. Don’t try to take it away from someone. However, you might mention some positive things that the bereaved did for the deceased. This can help give the person some perspective. Excessive guilt is an unhealthy sign.
- 8. Allow for differences in grieving.** Avoid expecting a person to be on a predictable time line in their grief.
- 9. Help the bereaved to adjust to life without the other.** Do “with”, not “for”. Do not encourage helplessness.
- 10. In time, encourage new relationships and involvements.**

## **GAINS IN DEATH LOSS**

### **NEW POTENTIALITIES DISCOVERED AND ACTUALIZED (PERSONAL)**

- \_ New-found independence and ability to act on it*
  - \_ Increased self-esteem*
  - \_ Acceptance of self*
  - \_ Increased confidence*
- \_ Renewed, more acceptable and/or meaningful religious outlook*
  - \_ New-found skills (things one felt incapable of before)*
    - \_ Increased competence*
    - \_ courage*

### **CHANGES IN ATTITUDE TOWARD LIFE AND DEATH (MEANING)**

- \_ Different value placed on the use of time*
- \_ Valuing people more than material things*
- \_ Seeing relationships as more important than accomplishments*
  - \_ Less fear of death – own and others*

### **LASTING LIFESTYLE CHANGES (SOCIAL/FAMILIAL)**

- \_ Working at one's close relationships that do remain*
  - \_ More quality time with family members*
    - \_ More active lifestyle*
    - \_ New work*
- \_ Greater ability to reach out to people/sensitivity (to touch and be touched)*
  - \_ Strengthened family ties (both in family of origin and by marriage)*

**HELP FOR**

**THE**

**BEREAVED**