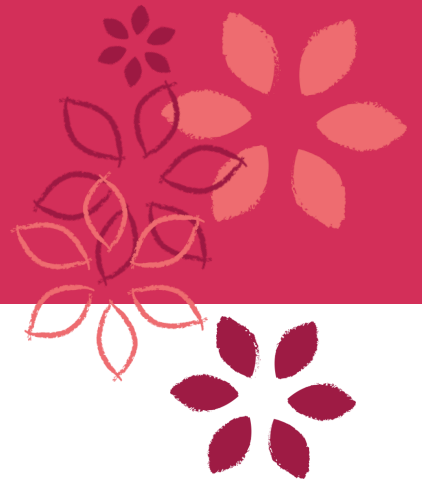


# Words That Comfort:

WHAT TO SAY AND NOT SAY TO GRIEVING PEOPLE



## When people are grieving, please don't say:

*"It was God's will." Or "God needed another rosebud for His garden (or another angel)." Or "Your loss is Heaven's gain."*

These statements assume that the bereaved person's belief system is the same as yours, which may be far from true.

*"You can remarry." Or "You can have more children." Or, "At least you have other children." Or, "You think you have it bad, let me tell you about ..."*

The bereaved person's situation is worse because it is theirs. Reminding mourners of their advantages seems to devalue their genuinely painful grief feelings.

*"You need to forget about the past and get on with life. Life is for the living."*

We ARE getting on with life and besides, if forgetting about the past is valuable, we should burn all the history books and tear down all the statues in the parks!

*"Don't cry." "Don't be angry." "Don't be sad." "Don't be afraid." Or any other "don't" feeling.*

You wouldn't say to a starving person, "Don't be hungry," so it makes no sense to tell grieving people not to feel their feelings.

*"I know just how you feel."*

**This is classically the most offensive thing bereaved people hear.** No one knows how another feels. It's better to say, *"Can you tell me about how you're feeling right now?"*

*"Time will heal."*

Not necessarily. For instance, time alone eventually may heal a broken bone, but without medical support, the bone can heal in a distorted way, making the limb forever useless.

Without emotional support, grief can heal in aberrant ways, too.



*Continued*

## Words That Comfort: What to Say and Not Say to Grieving People, continued

*“You have to be the man of the house now.”*

(This is mostly said to male children after the death of a father or older sibling.) Or, to any child after the death of a relative: *“You need to be strong for your [mom/dad].”*

This is not only a terrible burden to put on children, who need to grieve in their own way, but the adults around them may misinterpret their “strong” behavior as “not caring” that the loved one died.

*“You need to get on with your life.”*

If the mourner is functioning on any level at all (even walking upright!), they are getting on with their lives as well as they are able, considering where they are.

### **Please do say:**

*“I’m sorry for your loss.” Or “I am sorry you are hurting.”*

*“It’s normal to feel sad; it’s OK to cry.”*

*“It’s OK to talk about ‘John’ (use the name of the deceased). Take time to collect your thoughts.”*

If the grieving individual has difficulty speaking with you and it is obvious that grief is consuming their life, ask them if they have someone they trust and can talk to. If not, you might suggest:

- Family members
- Clergy
- A counselor
- A support group
- A long-time friend or neighbor

These guidelines can prompt creative sharing, based on common sense and heartfelt love.

