

RESPONDING TO A FRIEND IN GRIEF

"What should I say?"

Often, we want to say the "right" thing to our friend to ease their pain and make them feel better. We cannot, however, take away someone's pain from a significant loss. We can reach out to the person, let them know that we are available to support them, listen to them, provide a shoulder to cry on, and perhaps ease some of their loneliness. Rather than feeling pressure to say something profound or "right", look for ways to maintain your connection to your friend, letting them know that you are there, that you care about them.

"Should I talk about what happened?"

You probably can gauge this on the nature of your relationship with your friend before the loss and the cues they provide after the loss. To be more involved with your friend than you have previously been, may feel uncomfortable for both of you. Your friend may bring up what happened, inviting you to listen and respond. You will need to find a balance so that your friend feels neither intruded upon nor abandoned. It probably will be helpful to say something to your friend so that they do not feel that you are avoiding them. Sometimes a simple "I'm sorry for your loss; let me know if there is anything you need" suffices. At some point, you may discuss with your friend whether they would like to talk more about what actually happened.

"What can I do with my own feelings?"

Losses in the life of others often stimulate thoughts or feelings about losses in our lives. It is important to find supportive others to talk to about your feelings and reactions as you support your friend. It is important to express your feelings when talking with your friend while being sensitive to not overwhelming them as they manage their own feelings.

"When will life, and my friend, get back to normal?"

We often want things to get back to normal as soon as possible. It is important to remember that grief takes time, energy, and attention to work through. The grief process is unique with each person. There is no "normal" period of time for your friend to grieve. Often significant losses become less dominant in our friend's life while changing them on some deep level.

"What should I do if I feel like my friend is getting worse instead of better?"

The grief process is often not a smooth one. There may be good and bad periods for your friend. If you become concerned about your friend's health, safety, or daily functioning, you may gently let them know that there are many resources available to them including helping professionals.