

# HELPING A GRIEVING PERSON

- **The expression and release of emotional pain** is critical to healthy grieving. When you talk to someone about their loss and they cry and show emotion, you are not hurting them or sending them backward in their grief journey. The loss is what is causing the pain – not the conversation about it. **Crying and emotional outbursts are healing.**
- **Accepting the reality of a loss** is important for a grieving person. **Speak openly with them** about the loss, as it is important for it to be real.
- **A grieving person will have emotional highs and lows.** Imagine the person on a roller coaster complete with ups and downs. If the grieving person **has a good cry and feels better**, their grief is not over. If they later have a bad day, it does not mean they need psychiatric counseling. **Be patient with the process!**
- **It is not possible for you to “fix” a person’s loss.** Refuse to think of your role as “*making it all better*”. Rather, think of your role as a **companion** coming alongside a grieving person to help carry their pain. **Grieving is not contagious.** You cannot catch it or own responsibility for making the pain go away. For this reason, you do not have to avoid a grieving person.
- **Prepare yourself for the crazy grief reactions a grieving person will have.** They are in fact a **very normal** aspect of the grief journey. Expect to see depression, anger, fear, hopelessness and questioning of values and beliefs following a significant loss.
- **Grief does not have a predictable timetable.** Do not expect a person’s grief to be **over** in a few months. Every person’s grief is unique, and for most people experiencing a significant loss, the first few years are going to be exceedingly difficult.
- **Physical reactions to grief are common.** Grieving people may gain weight, lose weight, **sleep all the time or not at all**, complain of a lack of energy, feel stomach pain, experience anxiety or stress, and appear irritable, lethargic, and **unwilling to be out in public**. All these reactions may be related to grief.
- **A grieving person will be hypersensitive** to birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, special days, and even specific days of the month. **Make note of any of these days and reach out to the grieving person to offer comfort and support.** Allow the grieving person to be quiet and withdrawn if they choose to, and realize they are remembering their loss. **Trying to coerce a grieving person into being cheerful is not helpful.**
- **Understand that grief changes people.** They will not be the same person they were before their loss, and they will never be that person again. Waiting for the grieving person to *get back to their old self* will frustrate you. Suffering loss creates a new person with new thoughts, dreams, aspirations, values, and beliefs. Do your best to get to know the new person.

