

Family Life

How To Help A Friend In Need

(NAPSA)—The approaching holiday season can be difficult for those who have experienced the death of someone they love, and friends and family are often uncertain what they can do to help. Questions may arise about what songs, traditions or moments to avoid, but people may be uncomfortable asking. They may not understand their pain, but want to help them enjoy the holidays again.

Experts say each individual deals with grief uniquely during the holidays.

“Structured programs, processes or phases may not apply to grief and loss,” says George W. Clarke, executive director of Selected Independent Funeral Homes, an association of privately owned funeral homes, many of which are offering grief programs in their local community. “Each person has different needs to get through the holidays, and the most valuable support friends and family can offer is to listen.”

AARP’s Grief and Loss Programs also believes listening is a powerful tool, but distinguishes between conversation and what they call “active listening.” According to their Web site, “You want your response to convey respect, build trust, and prevent misunderstanding. Often a good listener paraphrases in his or her own words what the speaker has said...It’s important to check to see if you have understood correctly. Often you can tell by their nonverbal response, e.g. whether they seem to nod in agreement or

Local Grief Resources

- Your place of worship
- Your doctor
- Your funeral director
- Local book store
- Local AARP Grief and Loss Programs or AARP Widowed Persons Services
- Local support groups



shake their head from side to side indicating disagreement.”

Clarke points to three things to consider when comforting a loved one during the holidays:

1) For many dealing with loss, the holidays are about survival, and celebration cannot be forced. If old traditions increase the pain of the holidays, discuss new traditions that might honor the person who has died.

2) Nothing you can say or do can alleviate or increase your loved one’s grief. Do not try to make your own experiences or advice relevant, but focus on their needs. Ask questions and share memories, but do not shift the focus to your experiences.

3) “Getting on with life,” “forgetting the past,” and “time heals all wounds” are phrases that may be well intended, but are seldom helpful. Your loved one is learning to live with loss. Be available when he or she wants to talk, and encourage him or her to do so when ready.

For more information on grief and loss, go to www.selectedfuneralhomes.org or www.griefandloss.org.