

# Ten Principles for Helping the Bereaved

## **1. Help the survivor actualize the loss**

Be willing to listen to the survivor review the events of the loss, over and over if necessary, in order to come to a more complete awareness that the loss is real - the person is dead - and will not be coming back. Mention the dead person's name when appropriate. Stay away from platitudes.

## **2. Help the survivor to identify and express feelings**

Many survivors have difficulty with one or more of the following feelings: anger, guilt, anxiety, and helplessness. Affirm the expression of these feelings when they occur. When appropriate, mention your own feelings but avoid telling "your story".

## **3. Provide time to grieve**

Create a "safe place" for the survivor to express grief. Allow the survivor to speak and/or cry as often as needed.

## **4. Interpret normal behavior**

There are many moods and expressions of grieving. Know what uncomplicated grief is. Because of the diversity and intensity of these experiences many people have a sense that they are going crazy. Reassure the survivor about the normality of these new feelings and/or behaviors.

## **5. Allow for individual differences**

The time and manner of grieving is individual to each person. Grieving is as unique as finger prints. Expectations about stages of grief and measures of time are not helpful.

## **6. Provide continuing support**

Consistent presence and availability over the long run is best. Remember dates e.g., anniversary, birthday, date of death, etc., and send a note, call, or visit.

## **7. Examine defenses, and coping styles**

Help the survivor to evaluate the effectiveness of his/her particular defenses and coping styles. For example, a person's use of alcohol, drugs, replacement persons, responses to reminders of deceased, can be indications of healthy or unhealthy coping styles. Explore other possible coping methods that may be more effective in lowering distress and resolving problems.

## **8. Assist living without the deceased**

Help facilitate the survivor's ability to live without the deceased and make decisions independently. Examine the many roles the deceased played in the survivor's life. In general, the survivor should be discouraged from making major life-changing decisions during periods of acute grief. Examples are: the sale of property, change of job/career, adopting a child, etc.

## **9. Facilitate emotional withdrawal from the deceased**

Encourage the survivor, in time, to form new relationships. Help him/her realize that although the lost person cannot be replaced, it is all right to form new relationships and/or develop new interests.

## **10. Identify pathology and refer**

Know your limitations. If you spot trouble, refer a person for grief therapy or other psychotherapy. Be knowledgeable of specific therapists in your area who are particularly effective in dealing with issues of loss and grief.