

10 Best and Worst Things to Say to Someone Who is Bereaved



so you don't put your foot in it and embarrass yourself or the other person but instead come across as sensitive and compassionate



by Jane Duncan Rogers
www.beforeigosolutions.com

10 Best Things to Say To Someone Who Is Bereaved

Say nothing, just be with the person

not easy if you are not okay with the concept and the actuality of death; but it can be one of the most comforting things. You can practice this by imagining a zip closing your lips. The impulse to speak will eventually pass. Perhaps reach out and hold their hand, or touch their arm, or offer a hug.

1

I am so sorry for your loss

this may be appropriate, given your relationship with the person.

2

I am usually up early or late, if you need anything:

nice for the bereaved person to hear, but even better would be a card with your name and phone number on, and instructions on how to call you

3

I don't know what to say, what can be said? Know that I'm here for you

the first bit is fine, as it is true. Check in with the second bit - is it really true? If you are there for them, in what way does that show up? Be specific, and remember the ways grief affects people; they may not be able to identify what they need, let alone reach out for it.

4

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I wish I had the right words, just know I care

This is truthful and compassionate.

5

I can't imagine how you feel, but I am here to help in any way I can

Imagining how anyone else feels, even if you have had the same experience, can be dodgy. They may be feeling that emotion in an entirely different way to you. And is it true that you will help in any way you can? If so, think of one or two of those ways and offer them.

6

You and your loved one will be in my thoughts and prayers

This can be very soothing for someone who has religious beliefs. Be more wary of using it if you don't know what their beliefs are.

7

My favourite memory of your loved one is...

This can often be a lovely thing to hear; people's stories can be illuminating, poignant, funny, sad - it is often good to hear them, but also be sensitive to whether this is a good time to share the story. Ask the person if they would like to hear the memory, instead of just launching in with an assumption.

8

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Would you be okay with me calling you from time to time to see how you are?

Make sure that if they say no you will be okay with that! Otherwise, don't offer it.

9

I'd like to _____ (offer something specific) Is that okay with you?

It really can be helpful when people offer to do something, instead of waiting to hear what is needed. Be imaginative, put yourself in their shoes and see what you can come up with that might be helpful to them.

10

10 Worst Things to Say To Someone Who Is Bereaved

At least she lived a long life, many people die young

Not helpful, because who cares if someone else died young? Not the bereaved person. Comparison never works at a time like this. (It never works at all with tragedy of any kind).

1

10 Worst Things to Say To Someone Who Is Bereaved

He is in a better place

How do you know that is true? It may be your belief, but it may not be for the bereaved person. Watch out for putting your beliefs onto someone else, who may not appreciate them.

2

She brought this on herself

It is fairly unbelievable that anyone would say this, but I have heard it, or variations of it. Whether you believe it or not, it is NOT appropriate to say to anyone who may be grieving. If in doubt, always ask yourself 'Will this be useful if I say it?' Listen in for the answer, and if you get a no, keep your mouth shut. Even if it takes a big effort to keep that zip closed.

3

There is a reason for everything

Again, how do you know? This is meant to be a soothing response, but again, the timing here is crucial, plus you can take a lead from the bereaved person. If they start talking about this kind of thing, then you can follow. But otherwise, you are again putting your beliefs onto that person.

4

Aren't you over him yet, he has been dead for awhile now

There are all sorts of ideas out there about how long someone should grieve. I was astonished when I discovered that other widows and widowers took shorter (or longer) than I did to move into their new lives fully. Grief takes it's own time, depending on the circumstances, the family relationships, the way in which the death happened, and many other factors. Own this as your belief, and again, keep it to yourself

5

10 Worst Things to Say To Someone Who Is Bereaved

You can always have another child

Again, it is hard to believe that someone may say this, but it does happen, and is usually meant for the best. But it emphasises the idea of someone being replaced. No-one, of any age, can ever be replaced. It is an impossible thing to do. It may look like that - a man gets married again, parents do have other children, a woman finds a new lover. But that is the outer roles only - the person who died will still be with their loved ones inside their hearts, just in a different place to before.

6

She was such a good person, God wanted her to be with him

This might be likely to make the receiver feel very angry, as in them thinking 'but I wanted her/him to stay with me!' Again, it is meant to be comforting, but it actually only comforts you. Watch out for this, double check before you say anything and if in doubt, say nothing. Just be there with your presence.

7

I know how you feel

Do you? How do you know that? This is arrogant to assume, and again not helpful. You might say 'I can only imagine how you feel', or 'I know the same thing has happened to us, but right now I can only imagine how you are feeling'. Because even if you did have the same circumstances, as in the death of a spouse say, then you are a different person, will have related differently to your spouse, and need to be sensitive to this fact.

8

10 Worst Things to Say To Someone Who Is Bereaved

She did what she came here to do and it was her time to go

9

This may be the case in your way of thinking about it, but again, is it useful to the bereaved person to hear this? If they say it, then that is different. Follow their lead.

Be strong

10

When strength is the last thing they may be feeling, it might be more useful to say 'you will find you have a strength that you didn't know you had'. That's if you know that for yourself. That may then be helpful because you are lighting the path of grief ahead of the other person, and pointing out something that probably is universally true. In adverse circumstances almost everyone will discover a source of strength in one way or another. However, be cautious with the timing on this one. It is not always going to be helpful to a newly bereaved person to hear this - it's just too soon.

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By Jane Duncan Rogers
www.beforeigosolutions.com

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"I believe passionately that society needs to be more open about grief, death and dying".

Jane Duncan Rogers

Jane Duncan Rogers founded Before I Go Solutions in 2017 after her husband died and she discovered just how important planning in advance for a good end of life is.

It's enabled her to bring together over 25 years in coaching, personal growth leadership (Jane was the first person to lead the famous Louise L Hay's 'You Can Heal Your Life' study groups in the UK and Europe) and small business mentoring.

We train and equip people to help others make their end of life plans, bringing peace of mind, reassurance and relief to those you are working with AND their families through our accredited intensive training, the tools, the systems, and the ongoing support so you can bring to the world this crucial work.

Save loved ones from the unnecessary stress, arguments, and expense that happens when a loved one dies without an end of life plan in place.

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