

WHAT TO SAY - AND WHAT NOT TO SAY

Compassionate guidance for family, friends, and caregivers

When someone is grieving, it is natural to worry about saying the wrong thing. Supportive words do not need to explain the loss, remove the pain, or make the person feel better. The most comforting responses acknowledge what happened, honor the person who died, and let the grieving person know they do not have to face the experience alone.

WORDS THAT CAN HELP

Simple, sincere words can create safety and make room for grief without trying to change it.

- “I am so sorry. I am here with you.”
- “I do not know what to say, but I care.”
- “I would love to hear about them.”
- “You do not have to respond. I am thinking of you.”

WHY THESE WORDS MATTER

Helpful responses acknowledge the loss and allow the grieving person to lead the conversation.

- They validate the pain instead of minimizing it
- They offer presence rather than explanations
- They invite memories without demanding them
- They do not place a timeline on grief

WORDS TO AVOID

Well-intended phrases may hurt when they rush grief, search for a positive, or explain why the loss occurred.

- “Everything happens for a reason.”
- “At least they lived a long life.”
- “You need to be strong.”
- “I know exactly how you feel.”

A MORE HELPFUL RESPONSE

Replace advice and reassurance with language that is honest, gentle, and centered on the grieving person.

- Instead of “Be strong,” say “You do not have to be strong with me.”
- Instead of “At least...,” say “I am sorry this hurts so much.”
- Instead of comparing, ask “What has this been like for you?”
- Instead of giving advice, ask “Would you like me to listen?”

A GENTLE REMINDER

You do not need perfect words. Acknowledging the loss and staying present often means more than trying to make the pain disappear.

You do not need perfect words. Your steady, compassionate presence matters.

