

HOW DO YOU HELP A  
FRIEND WHO LOST A

# Parent

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When someone loses a parent, they need support from their friends. It does not matter if the parent lived a long full life. The age of the parent, their life circumstance, and physical or mental health will not lessen the feelings of loss. Even though it seems that losing a parent is the right order of things, grief will almost always follow.

Oftentimes, family members cannot be supportive of one another. They all have lost a special person. They will each experience grief in a way that is unique to the relationship they had with the parent. This can cause family conflict that translates into breakdowns in communications. Too often I work with families where each family member is grieving. At the same time, they are upset with other family members whom they perceive as not being supportive or caring. The fact is each family member's grief is similarly painful. When you are grieving it is hard to recognize and understand this. Feelings get hurt, comparisons are made, and family conflict can occur. It is not hard for us to assume that the family must be supporting one another. Sometimes, this is not the reality. People who seem to have many family and friends surrounding them, may still feel alone and lost and overwhelmed with grief. Please remember this, especially months down the road.

## How can you help?

- Ask them if they'd like to talk about their parent. Ask them how things are going for them.
- If you knew their parent, reminisce about them and share stories. Sharing stories keeps their memory alive. It opens a conversation that can be helpful and supportive. It can eliminate the elephant in the room!
- If they didn't have a good relationship with their parents, they might want to avoid sharing negative memories and you might feel you ought to leave the past in the past. However, not talking about them might mean they bury the pain, potentially causing emotional or health problems in the future. If you feel comfortable doing so, reassure them you're someone they can talk to if they want to, then just listen.

- Sometimes relationships with other family members can change. Roles in a family change. Don't hesitate to ask how things are going. Asking can create an opportunity to be supportive. A much-needed conversation can be had.

Feelings of grief can be triggered unexpectedly. Anniversaries, birthdays, holidays, and special days can be especially difficult. Not only during the first year following a loss, but year two and beyond can be especially difficult. Try to remember the special dates. These are good times to check in with your friend. Invite them to dinner or an outing of some sort. It provides an option if they are having a difficult time.

Keep checking in with them with regular contact. You don't have to keep asking how they are doing. Some people don't like to be asked that question. Give them little reminders now and then that you're ready to listen if they need to talk. Sometimes just being present and being together is enough.

Remember, it is okay to tell your friend you don't know what to say or do. Follow that by saying you are there for them always.

