

WAYS TO HELP A GRIEVING FRIEND

Talk openly to the bereaved friend about his/her loss and feelings. Don't try to offer false cheer or minimize the loss. Be supportive but do not attempt to give encouragement and reassurance (*this will pass* or *everything will be alright*) when the person is in the depressed stage of grieving. It will not be helpful. Talk openly and honestly about the situation unless your friend does not want to. Use an appropriate, caring conversational tone of voice.

Be available. Call, stop by to talk, share a meal or activity. Your presence and companionship are important. Show that you care. Listen attentively and show interest in what the grieving person has to say about his/her feelings and beliefs. Share your feelings and talk about any similar experience you may have had, but avoid using the phrase, *I know just how you feel* and avoid turning the conversation to be all about you.

Listen /be patient. Listening is an often overlooked gift of yourself. Allow the bereaved person to vent feelings. Don't judge the person's thoughts or feelings. Don't feel you need to offer advice. Listening itself is very powerful.

Take some action. Send a card, write a note, call. This is important not just immediately after the loss, but especially later, when grief is still intense but when others have resumed their daily lives and support for the bereaved may dwindle.

Encourage self care. Encourage your friend to care for himself or herself physically, emotionally, and socially. If symptoms of depression are very severe or persistent and the grieving person is not coping with day to day activities encourage professional help. The CCSD offers confidential individual counseling, and referral services.

Accept your own limitations. Accept that you cannot eliminate the pain your friend is experiencing. Grief is a natural, expected response to loss and each person must work through it in his/her own way and at his/her own pace. Be supportive, but care for yourself too.

Academic difficulties following a loss. Grief often has an impact on concentration, especially when the loss is fresh. This can result in a college student getting behind in work, feeling overwhelmed and sometimes missing several classes. Encourage the grieving student to talk with his/her professors and to inform the Dean of Students' Office of their loss. An extension on assignments can offer tremendous relief. In some situations the student may need to drop a class or take a leave from college. These decisions are best made in consultation with professors, counselors and the dean's office.

Spiritual/Religious Concerns following a loss. When a person is questioning their faith, the meaning of life, the fairness of God, or related concerns you might suggest they talk with the College Chaplain or the Friar in Residence. Although this is a common reaction that often passes with time, the student might benefit from some reassurance.

Consult. Seek the advice of your Residence Director or a member of the counseling staff when you are concerned about the student's functioning, the student remains depressed and withdrawn or when you feel you could use some reassurance that you are doing all you can.

*Adapted from the Counseling Center Village/University of Mary Washington and
Counseling Services, State University of New York at Buffalo*