

FOR CHILDREN & TEENS

Grief & Loss

How to show up for a friend who is hurting

When someone you know is grieving — whether they lost a family member, a friend, or someone close to them — it can be hard to know what to say or do. This guide is here to help.

The Most Important Thing

Showing up matters more than having the right words. “I don’t know what to say, but I’m here” is genuinely enough. Never avoid someone because you’re afraid of saying the wrong thing — that silence can feel like abandonment.

Talking to Someone Who Knew the Person Who Died

This section is for classmates, acquaintances, or anyone who knew the person but wasn’t extremely close to them.

✓ Things to Say or Do

- Reach out — even a short text or message matters
- “I’m really sorry for your loss.”
- Sit with them, even in silence
- Let them lead — some want to talk, some need a distraction
- Check in again weeks later — grief doesn’t disappear quickly

✗ Phrases to Avoid

- “Everything happens for a reason”
- “They’d want you to be happy”
- “I know exactly how you feel”
- “You need to stay strong”
- Pressuring them to get back to normal

Remember:

This may be your first time losing someone you knew. It’s okay to feel sad even if you weren’t close to them. You don’t need a reason to grieve.

Talking to Someone Who Was Very Close to the Person Who Died

This is for friends, family members, or anyone who had a deep relationship with the person who died.

✓ Things to Say or Do

- Use their name — “I miss them too”
- Share a memory of them

✗ Phrases to Avoid

- Disappearing because you feel awkward
- Minimizing — “at least they didn’t suffer”

- Ask: “What do you need right now?”
- Check in on birthdays and important milestones
- Gently encourage them to talk to a counselor if they seem really stuck

- Rushing them toward feeling better
- “God needed another angel” — this can hurt
- Assuming what they need — always ask

Gentle Encouragement:

If a friend seems really stuck in their grief, it’s okay to say “I think talking to someone could really help” — framing it as care, not weakness, makes it easier to hear.

Talking to Someone Who Survived a Traumatic Event

Sometimes grief comes alongside trauma — like surviving an accident, a disaster, or a situation where someone else didn’t make it. These friends need extra gentleness.

✓ Things to Say or Do

- “I’m really glad you’re here.”
- Treat them as normally as you can
- Let them bring it up — don’t push
- Be consistent and patient — trauma takes time
- Tell a trusted adult if you’re worried about them

✗ Phrases to Avoid

- Asking for details about what happened
- Making them retell the story repeatedly
- Any hint that it was their fault
- Questioning their decisions during the event
- Treating them as fragile or different

Survivor Guilt Is Real:

Someone who survived while others didn’t may feel guilty just for being alive. Don’t dismiss that feeling — just keep reminding them through your presence that their life matters and that you’re glad they’re here.

Don’t Forget About Yourself

Supporting a grieving friend is meaningful — and it can also be hard. It’s okay to feel sad, confused, or even helpless. You are allowed to grieve too.

- Talk to a trusted adult — a parent, counselor, pastor, or teacher
- Give yourself permission to feel your own feelings
- You don’t have to have all the answers — being present is enough
- Take breaks when you need to — you can’t pour from an empty cup

If You're Worried About a Friend — or Yourself

Tell an adult you trust. Your school counselor, pastor, or parent can help connect you with the right support.

In a crisis, text or call **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) — available 24/7.
