

When Friends Are Not There

“Grief is the Price We Pay for Love.” Elizabeth II

For some, friends are a beacon of light in the night of grief. They cannot seem to do enough, from helping with everyday chores to providing respite. But other friends are not a source of comfort. Many of us have experienced friends withdrawing, or saying things that we do not find supportive. When Tom’s daughter died, he said, “My friends avoided me. They seemed embarrassed when I talked about my loss. One of them even told me that I had to get over it.” Maxine’s friends were absent. “After the funeral, no one ever seemed to call. All the promises of support seemed forgotten.” There are many reasons why friends may not be there for us. Sometimes they too are grieving the loss. In other cases, they simply may not know what to say or how to react. Faced with that discomfort, they withdraw. Other times, they may try to be helpful but not know what to say or do. This is often the source of those “uncomfortable” comments that you may find hurtful. Studies have found that after a death, friendship networks can change. It is unfortunate since it adds to the already overwhelming sense of loss. But it doesn’t always have to happen.

If you are experiencing such strains and tensions in your friendships, or lack of support, here are things you can do:

Share your needs with your friends. Sometimes friends are not supportive simply because they do not know how to be. Tell your friends what you need.

Friends can offer different things

Some are good at listening, others may find it difficult to listen but they can help by doing things. Some are good to go with to a movie or out to eat. It is always useful to ask things of your friends that they can really do.

Cultivate other support systems - Grief groups can introduce you to people who have experienced similar types of losses. Many times, strong, supportive relationships can form. Forgive the friends that cannot be there, but treasure the ones that can. More than treasure, let them know how much you appreciate their presence.

Adapted from: Kenneth J. Doka, Ph.D.

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