

HOW TO TALK TO A FRIEND WHO IS GREIVING

In John Green's novel, *The Fault in Our Stars*, the main characters, Hazel and Augustus, experience grief and loss. Teenagers don't often talk about these feelings but will experience grief and loss at some point in their lives. Grief can be triggered from the death of a family member, friend, or person in the community.

If you have a friend who is grieving, it can be difficult to know how to help or what to say. Even if you can't find the right words, you can show patience and support by listening, being kind and honest, and being present for your friend.

Listen First

One of the best ways to support your grieving friend is by simply listening.

Your friend will likely have a lot of thoughts and feelings. They may be ready to share their feelings, or they may not want to talk right away. Both reactions are normal. Let them know that you support them and are ready to listen when they are ready to share.

When your friend confides in you, do your best to listen without judgement. Remember that your friend is going through many emotions, and they may struggle to find the best words to express those emotions.

When there is a break in the conversation, you may choose to speak with kindness and support, or you may choose to stay quiet. The choice to speak is yours. If you want to say something, consider a kind, supportive phrase like:

- "I've been thinking about you."
- "What you're going through sounds really difficult."
- "I'm here if you want to talk."

Be Kind and Honest

When you are ready to speak, focus on saying kind and honest things. You may not agree with everything your friend says or the way they are choosing to grieve. That is okay. You should focus on saying kind things and letting them process loss in their own way.

Avoid telling your friend that they "should" do something. There is no correct way to grieve, and your friend should focus on what feels right to them. If you do try to offer advice and accidentally hurt their feelings, don't ignore them. Apologize honestly and reinforce the idea that you want to support them.

If your friend seems like they need additional help, be honest and let them know what you observed. Sometimes those that are grieving need more help than you are equipped to offer. A trusted adult or mental health professional could provide the support they need.

Perform Small Acts of Kindness

If you are still at a loss for words, sometimes actions can be more meaningful. You can support your friend by doing small acts of kindness and intentionally including them in things you do every day.

At school, make a conscious effort to invite them to sit with you at lunch. Offer to walk them to class or invite them to study for a test with you. These may be things you do all the time, but by intentionally including them, you are showing kindness.

Your friend may not always want to do the things you invite them to do. That is normal and their response doesn't mean you did something wrong. Even if they decline, continue to invite them to activities and check in on them. Send them a single text or give them a call to remind them that they are not alone.

Be Patient

Grief doesn't have a set start time or end time. Your friend will experience, and likely show, a range of emotions. Even if they seem happy one day, it doesn't mean their grief is "over." It may take your friend a long time to go through a series of emotions.

Your friend will likely experience some days that feel normal and some that feel overwhelming. Some days they may be quiet, distracted, or easily upset. Some days they may be angry. Other days they may be cheerful.

Your friend may not be the same as before. It is important to support them regardless of their feelings. If your friend's mood changes and they suddenly seem angry or sad, don't take it personally. Mood changes are a normal part of grieving, and it is important to show patience.

Be Present

The most important part of helping a grieving friend is showing up to support them. Simply being with a friend can help them feel better. People most often remember *who* was with them during a difficult time, not *what* a person said or did.

An important part of being present is also checking in with your own emotions. If you are feeling sad, stressed, or angry, talk to a trusted adult or counselor. Your feelings are important too, and taking care of your emotional health is an important part of supporting a friend.

Supporting someone who is grieving is a process for both people. If you feel stuck, just remember to be your best self and be the best friend every way you can.

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