

How to Say “I’m Sorry” to Those Who Grieve

Offering condolences & comfort to grieving people is difficult for most of us. We are at a loss as to what to say or do. Too often, we shy away because we do not feel comfortable saying anything or we are afraid we will cause them additional sadness.

One thing to remember is that talking about the loved one who died is not going to make grieving people remember their loss or feel sad. Those memories are already there. If grieving people cry or show other emotions, you are not the cause. Understand that strong emotions are a normal part of the grieving process. Most grieving people want to talk about their loved one and enjoy hearing stories you have to tell.

Many of us want to offer comfort and great compassion to those who have lost a loved one. Not knowing what to say or fear of saying the wrong thing keeps us from reaching out to others in need. We recognize when someone is hurting & we fear adding to that hurt by saying or doing something that might be taken the wrong way. We often are afraid of strong emotions and feel unequipped to handle them. Sometimes, the death of someone reminds us of our own mortality and we do not want to be saddened.

“Condoling actions reaffirm our bonds to humanity; they strengthen and enlarge each of us. Each word of comfort, each letter of condolence, each act of helpful service has the potential to serve not only as a message of sympathy, but as a song of compassion and truth.”

Offering Condolences

- Take time to learn something about the grieving process. Most people think grief should end as soon as the funeral service is over. Grieving is a long & difficult path. It is an emotional, physical, spiritual and social reaction.
- Many factors will determine the depth of someone’s grief. Grief never ends. Many times, memories will remind people that their loved one is no longer with them. Their grief will lessen but will never disappear.
- Do not offer advice even if you have experienced a similar loss. Instead, offer suggestions. Remember that your grief is different and the things that helped you may not always help someone else.
- Keep your words simple. “I’m so sorry for your loss,” can say it all.
- Sometimes words are not enough. At these times, a hug or holding the person’s hand can convey concern and sympathy.
- Remember that nothing you can say or do will take away a person’s grief. You cannot “fix” someone, make him or her happy or return him or her to the way he or she was before the death. If you want to write your condolences, do not put it off. You are more likely to say what you want to say and convey your sincerity more effectively if you do it immediately.
- Be sincere.
- Do not say, “I know what you’re going through.” You do not.
- Always mention the deceased by name.
- Do not offer assistance unless you are prepared to follow through with actions.