



Avoiding the Clichés of Grief

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CLICHÉ

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES

"I know just how you feel."

If you have had a similar loss, you can give tremendous support to the grieving person, but don't suggest that you know exactly what they're going through.

"Time will heal."

Moldy oldie! To the bereaved, each day can seem like an eternity. Besides, how do you know that "time will heal" them? Time alone doesn't heal, but what one does with their time can help the healing process.
Alternative - "You must feel as if this pain will never end..."

"Life goes on."

"Life has dealt you a terrible blow. I know it will be hard for you in the months to come to live with this pain."

"You must be strong for your...."

"You're the (wo)man of the house now."

"You're being so strong/brave"

These types of "Be Strong" statements can be interpreted to say "*Don't cry in front of me!*" Children and teens can take statements like these literally, which may cause them to repress their grief feelings.
Alternatives - "Make sure you're taking care of you...I can't imagine how hard this must be."

"You've got to get a hold of yourself."

To onlookers, some grief behavior seems very strange, but we must remember that each person is different and will handle grief in their own way. What works for one may not work for another. Support their need to cope with their grief, and don't be judgmental about how they choose to do it.

"You're holding up so well."

Avoid statements that encourage keeping feelings inside -- this takes more energy than expressing one's feelings. "Let your feelings out", "Don't feel you have to be strong for/in front of me," are possible alternatives.

"You're not your old self."

Remember that one is *never* the same after experiencing the death of a loved one.



CLICHÉ

"I just don't understand your behavior."

"You should be over this by now."

"No sense in dwelling in the past."

"If I were you, I would do it this way..."

"It's a blessing."
"God needs him/her more than you do."
"It was God's will."

"If there is anything I can do, just call me."

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES

"I know you are doing the best you can under the circumstances."

"Get On With Life" clichés tell the grieving person that *"We're tired of hearing this!"* The time it takes for one to work through his or her grief is highly individual. There is no set time in which one should "get over it."
Alternative - "I know it will take a long time for you to feel better, and I want to help you as much as I can. Teach me how."

It is important for a bereaved person to nurture memories of the loved one. We cope with loss by allowing the memories to live on.

"I cannot tell you what to do because I am not you, and I don't know exactly what you're going through."
"I've had a similar experience, so I have an idea of what you must feel. What I learned/helped me is...."

These types of statements, although good in intention, do not help the one who's grieving to feel any better. In fact, it may prompt the person to feel guilty about their grief feelings.

The grieving person probably will not call you. You must take the initiative and be specific so that they know your offer is genuine and not *cliché*.

Do not assume that the grieving person knows how you feel. The worst thing you can do is to do or say nothing in acknowledgement of their loss. It is also true that there are no perfect words! *Suggestion*: - "I don't know how to tell you how awful I feel/sorry I am about your loss."

It is okay to talk about the person who died. In fact, the grieving person will probably really appreciate that you brought it up. We often assume we will upset the grieving person if we bring up their loved one's name, so we wait for them to say something first. However, *not* bringing it up often causes the grieving person to feel as if no one cares.