

Avoiding the Cliches of Grief

Try open ended statements. Try to avoid telling people what they “should” or “should not” be feeling, doing, etc. Do not assume to know what someone is going through or experiencing.

1. *Cliché:* “You must be strong for your children (spouse, relatives, friends, etc).”
Instead, try: Why not share your feelings with your children? Perhaps you can lean on one another and help support each other.
2. *Cliché:* “You’ve got to get hold of yourself.”
Instead, try: “It must be so hard to keep going when you’re hurting so much.”
3. *Cliché:* “You are holding up so well.”
Instead, try: “Would it help to talk about how you’re feeling?”
4. *Cliché:* “Time will heal.”
Instead, try: “You must feel as if this pain will never end.”
5. *Cliché:* “You’re young, and you will be able to make a new life for yourself.”
Instead, try: “You must miss your loved one and the life you had together; I do, too.”

What to Say

I’m sorry.
I’m sad for you.
How are you doing with all this?
I don’t know why it happened.
What can I do for you?
I’m here and I want to listen.
Please tell me what you are feeling.
This must be hard for you.
What’s the hardest part for you?
I’ll call tomorrow.
You must really be hurting.
It isn’t fair, is it?
You must really feel angry.
Take all the time you need.

What *Not* to Say

I understand how you feel.
Death was a blessing.
It was God’s will.
It all happened for the best.
You’re still young.
You have your whole life ahead of you.
You can have other children.
You can always remarry.
Call me when I can help.
Something good will come of this.
At least you have another child.
She/he led a full life.
It’s time to put it behind you.
Be strong!