



Voices of Grief:  
Honoring the Sacred Journey

# Companioning Suggestions from the Film

## WHAT TO DO

Deal with your own fear first. Do not require the grieving person to make it more comfortable for you. Loss is not contagious nor is it about you. Be honest with yourself and sort this out BEFORE attempting to console another. Be prepared. Be mindful.

Go there. Sit there. Be fully present to your friend. Don't avoid tears: theirs or yours. Do not attempt to distract them from their grief with small talk.

Do not tell your story of grief—focus instead on your friend. In time, sharing a bit at a time may be helpful when requested, but keep it simple and refocus on your friend. Let your friend guide your sharing.

Generally, a gentle touch or wordless hug is all that needs to happen, depending on your friend. Make this about what they can receive, not what you want to give.

Do that thing they need even if they don't know what it is. Some helpful tasks include:

- Managing the gifts of food coming into the home. Deal with leftovers, food surpluses that cause stress (food banks/shelters welcome surplus).
- Empty the trash.
- Wash laundry.
- Run necessary errands.
- Pull weeds and mow lawn.
- Drive kids to school or arrange play dates.

If you're a really close relative/friend, develop with the grieving one the equivalent of a 'safe word' to help manage fear, panic and inability to assert oneself in the initial few weeks, both in interaction with you and in managing those who mean well but miss the mark. Do this only in concert with your loved one you wish to companion—it is always their right to control the environment as they wish.

Be there for the long haul. Home and work routines may resume but don't assume anything. Continue to visit, phone, invite. Expect a roller-coaster of emotion, energy, and openness and practice not taking the ups and downs personally. It takes courage to be a good companion to someone who is grieving. Be that companion that is so needed and, in time, appreciated.

Be sure to remember all touched by the loss—children, siblings, parents, grandparents, close friends, including possibly yourself.

## WHAT TO SAY

Don't over-talk. No words are adequate so more of them is not more adequate. Silencing sitting together is often the best kind of presence to offer.

Some helpful short things to say at first greeting:

- "I don't know what to say, but I am here. You are not alone."
- "I don't know how you feel because I am not you, but I see that you are hurting and I love you. Do what you need to do."
- "Call me early, call me late—I am here for you."
- "I don't know what to offer/ how to help, but I want to. Know that you can ask and I am willing."
- "My favorite memories of your loved one are." Cherish the loved one with them.

## WHAT NOT TO SAY

Conversely, there are well-meaning comments that are not helpful and serve to block/stop the experience of loss. Among them are:

- "I know how you feel..." (Every experience is unique).
- "You are such a strong person...a survivor." (Implies suffering is unacceptable).
- "God never gives you more than you can handle." (Can you speak for God?).
- "She or he is in a better place." (I want them here).
- "Everything will be alright." (Who knows that? It certainly isn't right now).
- "You have to move on." "Life goes on." (Who says? Why? Who decides that for me?)

Please share this guide with anyone you know who may benefit these suggestions.

For more information on how to participate in a screening of our film in your community, go to [voicesofgrief.org](http://voicesofgrief.org).