

Companioning Suggestions From The Film

1. Deal with your own fear first. Do not require the grieving person to make it easier/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.
2. 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.
3. Don't over-talk. No words are adequate so more of them is not more adequate. Silently 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. Say their name.

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?)
 - "Call me if you need anything." (Offer specific help if you genuinely mean to help).
4. 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.
 5. 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.

6. 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 and fold laundry.
 - Run necessary errands.
 - Pull weeds and mow lawn.
 - Drive kids to school or arrange play dates.
7. 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.
8. 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 it 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.
9. Be sure to remember all touched by the loss—children, siblings, parents, grandparents, close friends, including possibly yourself.

Tenets of Companionship the Bereaved

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Tenet One

Companionship is about being present to another person’s pain;
it is not about taking away the pain.

Tenet Two

Companionship is about going into the wilderness of the soul with another human being;
it is not about thinking you are responsible for finding the way out.

Tenet Three

Companionship is about honoring the spirit;
it is not about focusing on the intellect.

Tenet Four

Companionship is about listening with the heart;
it is not about analyzing with the head.

Tenet Five

Companionship is about bearing witness to the struggles of others;
it is not about judging or directing these struggles.

Tenet Six

Companionship is about walking alongside;
it is not about leading or being led.

Tenet Seven

Companionship is about discovering the gifts of sacred silence;
it does not mean filling up every moment with words.

Tenet Eight

Companionship is about being still;
it is not about frantic movement forward.

Tenet Nine

Companionship is about respecting disorder and confusion;
it is not about imposing order and logic.

Tenet Ten

Companionship is about learning from others;
it is not about teaching them.

Tenet Eleven

Companionship is about compassionate curiosity;
it is not about expertise.

“In your journey through grief, seek out the support of those who naturally adopt a “companionship” attitude toward you and avoid those who don’t.”

Dr. Alan Wolfelt, “Understanding Your Grief”

Myths of Grief

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Myth #1: Grief and mourning are the same experience.

Most people tend to use the words grief and mourning interchangeably. However, there is an important distinction between them. We have learned that people move toward healing not by just grieving, but through mourning. Simply stated, grief describes the internal thoughts and feelings we experience when someone we love dies. Mourning, on the other hand, is taking the internal experience of grief and expressing it outside ourselves.

Myth #2: There is a predictable and orderly progression to the experience of grief. Stage-like thinking about both dying and grief has become an appealing idea to many people. Somehow the “stages of grief” have helped people make sense out of an experience that isn’t as orderly and predictable as we would like it to be. Each person’s grief is uniquely his or her own. It is neither predictable nor orderly.

Myth #3: It is best to move away from grief and mourning instead of toward it. Many grieverers do not give themselves permission or receive permission from others to mourn. We live in a society that often encourages people to prematurely move away from their grief instead of toward it. Many people view grief as something to overcome rather than experience. The result is that many of us either grieve in isolation or attempt to run away from our grief.

Myth #4: Tears expressing grief are only a sign of weakness. Unfortunately, many people associate tears of grief with personal inadequacy or weakness. Crying on the part of the mourner often generates feelings of helplessness in friends, family and caregivers. Out of a wish to protect mourners from pain, friends and family may try to stop the tears. Comments such as “Tears won’t bring him back” and “He wouldn’t want you to cry” discourage the expression of tears.

Myth #5: The goal is to “get over” your grief. We have all heard people ask, “Are you over it yet?” To think we as human beings “get over” grief is ridiculous! We never “get over” our grief but instead become reconciled to it.