

Master this vital life skill

There's a very important life skill that is not taught in schools, yet it's something that is needed time and again over the course of a lifetime: How to console our friends, work-colleagues and family members who face death, loss or grief.

Loss of a loved one is something we all experience, a shared human experience. But for many of us, talking about death is uncomfortable and can be a barrier to providing support to those who suffer a loss. It may be because we don't know what to say or do; we don't want to intrude; we find it difficult to deal with deep emotions; or it stirs our own grief about our own past or future losses.

Being there when someone needs help is very important – after all, we will all need the same support in our lives, too. Here are some “Dos and Don'ts” from loss counselors that may help to make things a little easier in offering support.

Do learn about the stages of grief. It's normal for someone to be depressed or angry. Let them work through it. Expect sadness and tears.

Don't try to fix things. You can't.

Do offer more than words. Run errands, offer a ride, mind kids, bake a meal or just spend time.

Don't make it about you or how you feel. It's about them. Listen with compassion. Validate feelings.

Do hug the person, take their hand, or offer a light touch. The warmth of human touch can be healing.

Don't be judgmental. Their timeline isn't your timeline. Their way of mourning may not be the same as yours.



Do help to memorialize the loved one. Plant a tree, gather photos, share memories or start a fund.

Don't minimize or explain away the loss. Avoid platitudes and phrases like “it was his time.”

Do remember into the future. Reach out on anniversaries and special days with a call or a card.

Here are some things you can say:

- I'm so sorry for your loss.
- I'm available anytime you need to talk.
- What can I do for you?
- I'm sorry I never had a chance to meet your aunt – she sounds wonderful.
- Your Dad loved you so much, he always talked about you.
- You are in my thoughts and prayers.
- If you knew the person, share a special memory or a trait you admired.

Grief and loss are some of the most common reasons people seek help from their EAP. Remember, if you or a family member experiences the loss of a loved one, call your EAP 24-7 for help, support and tools.