

Seven Simple Ways to Support Those Who Grieve

The Personal Account
of a Bereaved Mother



Patricia Fraser

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Praise for Seven Simple Ways to Support Those Who Grieve

by Patricia Fraser

“7 Simple Ways is a must have book for, well, anyone. At some point in everyone's life will come a time when they either lose a loved one or know someone who does. When that moment arrives having Ms. Fraser's book readily at hand will be invaluable. Who among us has not experienced a time where we did not know what to do for a friend or family member who was grieving? This book has 7 simple suggestions and by doing even just one of those things you will have provided a wealth of support and comfort to those that are in need of it the most.”

- Babette Zschiegner, author Traveling Joyfully with Your Autistic Child

“This book is clear, concise and easy to read. The tips will help anyone who is with a person who is grieving a loss. It is the "go to" book to know exactly how to be, what to do and say.”

- Christine Brownlee, Certified From
Heartbreak to Happiness Coach

- Englehart, Ontario

"I just read this book and I think it's great! I ran into an old school friend yesterday for the first time since my husband's death. It felt very awkward for both of us as she was speechless and didn't know what to say to me. Hopefully this book reaches lots of people to help all of us feel more comfortable with those who are grieving."

- Linda Marshall

Halifax, Nova Scotia

*Seven Simple Ways
to Support Those
Who Grieve*

While suffering through the horrifically brutal murder of our fourteen-year-old daughter, I was saddened that people around me were struggling with their own feelings.

Regardless of race, religion, or socio-economic background, I noticed that most people had troubles relating to us comfortably.

Others, I'm sorry to say, avoided us completely because they simply weren't equipped with the right tools to allow themselves to relax and be at ease around us.

Our generation has grown up—and our children's will be worse—more or less isolated from death, compared to previous generations, when death took place in the home and so did the visitations and wakes. Children grew up more at ease with loss when a loved one lay in a casket in the living room for two or three days.

Now, unfortunately, many parents protect their children from death even when the deceased was close to them. It is so much better for them to realize, in a safe and loving environment, that death is a natural part of life.

In the case of a young tragedy they need to be reassured that this is very rare and that although the body is dead, the spirit is alive and happy in a better place.

If we teach our children now to be comfortable with death, it will serve them and their loved ones well as adults.

It is my greatest wish that these seven simple tips will assist others and help them find a way, not only to relate, but to support a friend or family member who is grieving.

Be Present

If you take nothing else from this book, take this: Be present.

The most beautiful part is that you don't have to DO anything. It's as simple as just being there. Most people won't reach out to ask for help. They won't ask a friend to sit with them while they cry, eat or sleep. You take that burden off their shoulders simply by being there without being asked. There will be far too many times when a grieving person feels there is no one to lean on, and nights that seem to go on forever until the sun comes up.

When we sit in silence with someone, at first, it's uncomfortable and often we feel the need to fill the emptiness, but that isn't necessary. Just truly listening to someone without distraction or judgment is a beautiful gift.

The first time I truly understood how important it was to have people around

me was at the hospital when we were just realizing that it was our daughter who had been murdered. It was like a nightmare that was happening to someone else. I was in complete shock, and yet I noticed those who were there, and they gave me strength. They weren't doing anything except standing against the wall in supportive, non-judgmental silence, expecting nothing of me.

As a police officer, there are times, sadly, when tragedy befalls a fellow officer. When that happens, the members of the police department become a cohesive family unit for the person who needs them most. Truthfully, I didn't understand what good mulling around an emergency department or home of a fallen officer could be to anyone. I always thought it would be an intrusion and imposition to the family. I suspect that was due in part to my upbringing and feeling sorry

for the family having to “be strong” in the face of so many visitors.

But I was wrong. The presence of each and every person who was there that day and for the months after our loss meant the world to me.

I was, and continue to be, very lucky. I have many unwavering supporters, but what if your friend or loved one doesn't have such a luxury? He or she may be an only child, single without children and no living parents. What about the woman with children to raise who has lost her husband and parents and has no siblings? What a horribly lonely feeling that would be, coupled with the grief, shock, horror and sadness.

Many times, from the minute we heard the shocking news and the countless days at court that seemed to never end, having people with us helped immensely.

A distraction is important. When someone else is around it helps take our minds off the pain. It doesn't rid us of it, but it does pass the time. When it feels like time has stopped and the world has crashed down, anything to help time move forward is a blessing. Friends and family make all the difference.

*"The friend who can be silent with us in
a moment of despair or confusion, who
can stay with us in an hour of grief and
bereavement, who can tolerate not
knowing... not healing, not curing... that
is a friend who cares.*

C.S. Lewis



*Don't Worry About
Saying the Wrong
Thing*

Knowing that someone had risen above their own angst for my benefit was remarkable and brought me comfort.

But being there means trying to think of something to say and I suspect that many people stay away because they are afraid they'll say something wrong or make things worse.

What I know for certain, as I stated in the previous chapter, is your presence is paramount and words need not be spoken. There is nothing that can be said to ease the pain, but the strength of your presence is powerfully healing. It's perfectly acceptable to simply be honest and say, "I wish I knew what to say." I was relieved when I heard that because then I had an easy answer. "There is nothing to say. Thank you for coming."

Most people try to think of something comforting, reassuring or profound to

ease the awkwardness we all feel when someone else is hurting and we are impotent to help. These are normal feelings, but don't be afraid because it is the gift of your presence that matters.

Realize that well-intended words, blurted out in an emotional moment, are rarely internalized by the person, who is grieving. Some things, however, would be good to keep in mind, as in the following examples:

Don't say, "I know how you must be feeling". Even if you do, it's about them at that moment and your focus should be on them, not telling your own story.

With the death of a child, don't say, "Well, at least you have the others." The loss of one child is not diminished by the presence of other children in the home, nor does it decrease the love for the lost child or for each individual living child.

In the case of a miscarriage or stillborn, don't say, "You can always try for another one." This minimizes a grieving parent's loss.

Don't change the subject if your friend or relative speaks of their loved one. You needn't do anything more than listen with an open heart and then say, "Thank you for sharing that with me."

If the death is sensationalized for whatever reason, don't try to become that person's best friend. Respect the relationship you had before the loss.

You can never go wrong with, "I'm so sorry for your loss. I wish I could say something to make it better, but I can't. What I can do is sit with you and if you feel like talking, you've got my full attention. If not, that's okay too."

It's hard to sit in silence for many people. Sometimes we feel the need to fill the space when perhaps all we need to do is be still. When you know that

it's your presence that is making a difference, it is easier to handle the silence.

Many of us are “doers”, so we feel as though we must be fixing, doing or saying something, but unless you can magically ease the pain, or be of some real practical help, simply supporting the bereaved quietly is a beautiful gift.

*"This communicating of a man's self to
his friend works two contrary effects; for
it redoubleth joy, and cutteth griefs in
half."*

Francis Bacon



*Send Food Not
Flowers*

The easiest thing to do when someone is grieving is to send flowers. It's the first thing we think of and must be ingrained in our society as an acceptable course of action.

Flowers are beautiful and befitting someone who is grieving but not always practical.

If fortunate, there will be an abundance of flowers, too many to appreciate for their individual beauty, but flowers die very quickly which can be one more reminder of loss.

Plants are a lovely alternative but be careful with heavily perfumed flowers because our sense of smell is most closely linked with memory. A once pleasant aroma of freshly cut flowers can turn into an endless reminder of a very painful time, even years later.

Sustenance, on the other hand, can be a most welcome blessing.

The first few days after our daughter's death, I remember very little. I don't remember eating, though perhaps I did, nor was I paying attention to what the other people in the house were eating, including our other children. I was oblivious to almost everything going on around me.

At one point an Edible Arrangement® arrived at our door. An Edible Arrangement® is an arrangement of gorgeous fresh fruit cut in the shape of flowers, and these were covered with chocolate, smelling glorious. As a family we stood around the kitchen island and finished the entire bouquet. It felt like for the first time in days we were eating and bonding as a family. It was as nourishing as it was delicious and exactly what we all needed right then. It brought my son, then 12, such comfort, he made me promise that from then on, anyone we knew who was grieving would received a bouquet

from us – it was the first time he felt better in days.

Blessing others with food is wonderful, and can help when simple decisions are so difficult to make. We had many donations of food, some extremely generous, filling our freezer and others simple, easy to prepare dishes still warm from the oven with their aromas enticing us to eat.

If bringing a meal to someone feels too familiar, a gift card for a restaurant that delivers would be a fantastic alternative.

When we are grieving deeply, our appetite diminishes and our will to eat disappears. We need to keep up our strength and eating combined with rest, plays a big part in that.

*“There is nothing better than a friend,
unless it is a friend with chocolate.”*

Charles Dickens

“Food is the language of friendship”

Patricia Fraser



*Write Down
Everything You
Remember About
Their Loved One*

The memories we have of our loved ones fade. Dates and times get confused, the years blend together and there are never any new memories.

One of the greatest gifts we can give someone is to write down our memories of their loved one, which gives them new memories to celebrate. Do it while it's fresh in your mind, and make a point of asking others to do the same.

My daughter's grade eight teacher, a dear man, sincere in his own grief took the time to write a very long letter to me with all the things he could remember about their year together, just one year earlier. He gave me one of the greatest gifts ever. I have read and re-read that letter so many times the paper is falling apart.

If you have the time, interview others, compile stories and put it all together as

a gift for your loved one. Ask people at the visitation or after the funeral to give you a quick “best memory” and jot it down for later.

Better yet, film them or take their picture as they recount their tales. How quickly we lose contact with people who truly mattered to our loved ones and what a beautiful way to remember all of them as time goes by and the memories fade.

It might be beyond the realm of possibility but filming the funeral for the family is an incredible gift, but get their permission first.

I recalled the funeral for the daughter of a girlfriend of mine about ten years before my own daughter's. I always remember the words of my friend which she admitted to being a little ashamed to speak “I wish I had a recording of that service, it was

beautiful and I'll never remember all of it, I'm just too upset."

When it came time for my own daughter's funeral, due to the overwhelming support, our small church was unable to hold everyone in the sanctuary. Blessed by an amazing employer, Toronto Police Services, the Video Services Unit came to pipe the recording of the funeral into other rooms within the church so all could see. I was worried that others would think I was morose, but when I had an opportunity to ask if they could record it, although not something normally done, a very kind, empathic, and non-judgmental gentleman said he would do that for us as a favour. I'm so thankful to have that recording. I don't remember the service but it was beautiful and those who spoke, did so with such reverence and love for our daughter. I enjoy watching it now and feel such pride and joy in my family

and all those who helped us. It doesn't bring me sadness, but rather the contrary.

Reading the memories of others with my daughter and watching the video of her funeral has brought me much comfort.

*"The reason one writes isn't the fact he
wants to say something. He writes
because he has something to say."*

F. Scott Fitzgerald



*Look For a Need and
Help Out*

Grief is exhausting. It robs us of sleep and appetite, which reduces our cognitive function. When the loss is very new, some people shouldn't be driving, nor doing anything that requires much thought or coordination.

But life has to go on, especially if there are children to look after. When looking to lend a hand, it's easier if you make a suggestion rather than asking how you can help. Giving someone who is grieving and already overwhelmed two or three choices of things you might do for them is easier than for them to try to remember what needs to be done.

Without overstepping any bounds, here are some ideas of things one might do to help a friend in need:

Lend a hand in funeral arrangements.

Shop for needed clothing for the other children to wear at the funeral.

Make phone calls.

Take things to the funeral home.

Pick up groceries.

Take them to any appointments.

Do some banking or bill paying.

Return movie rentals.

Arrange for house-cleaning.

Take the car for an oil change, or other minor vehicle repairs.

Watch the kids for a few hours.

Offer to walk pets or take care of them.

Check on the house if the grieving person goes away for a while.

Facilitate professional grief support, like a Grief Coach.

Do anything else you can think of that may be helpful.

We had rented a karaoke machine for the New Year's Eve family get-

together and it was due back on January 2nd. Our daughter was murdered on January 1st and the last thing that should have been on my mind was that machine. The cost was going to double if we didn't return it on time and although the cost was irrelevant then, it was a relief to have someone return it, saving us from the throngs of media that now surrounded our home.

"It is not so much our friends' help that helps us, as the confidence of their help."

Epicurus

"Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up."

Bible: Ecclesiastes



*Don't Disappear
After the Funeral*

For the first few days after the death of a loved one, there are many distractions and little down time to truly absorb what has happened. Shock and denial are a big part of the first few weeks.

It's in the months and sometimes years after a death that your loved one truly needs you.

In the January 2005 issue of Time Magazine, it stated that the average time people grieve is 5-8 years. A professional can help reduce this time significantly. Consider recommending a grief coach.

If the death involves the police and a court case ensues, remember that they will be forced to relive that grief in a very public forum. They will need your friendship throughout the process...a small caveat however. It's not appropriate to show up when the

media spotlight is on them, only to disappear again afterwards.

When we were the lead story in the news, many steadfast friends were lovingly understanding of our renewed grief. A few people though, having been reminded of us after seeing the news, thought that was the time to send an e-mail hoping to “catch up”.

Regardless of the circumstances surrounding the loss, the bereaved will still need you there for the long haul.

Suggest going for a walk or a cup of coffee. Watch a movie together or simply visit for a few minutes and listen unconditionally over and over for as long as it takes your friend or loved one to work through the grief—these small things are so very important.

*Tis not enough to help the feeble up, but
to support them after.”*

William Shakespeare



*Look for Any
Warning Signs*

People who are grieving will react in their own way and work through the grief at their own speed. There is no wrong or right way to grieve.

Everyone is different.

It's common for a grieving person to feel disheartened, bewildered, cut off from others, or feel as though they are losing a grip on reality. But if your loved one worsens, it may be a sign that normal grief is now a more serious problem, such as clinical depression.

It's not easy to encourage a loved one to seek professional help but if you observe any of the following warning signs, regardless of how uncomfortable, you must try.

Isolation

Substance abuse

Absenteeism from work

Inability to get out of bed
Talk of suicide and death
Obsession with death
Neglecting personal hygiene
Difficulty functioning in daily life.

It is our responsibility to keep a watchful eye over our loved ones, and if they appear to be worsening rather than improving, we must take action.

*“Love is all we have, the only way that
each can help the other.”*

Euripides





Seven Simple Ways to Support Those Who Grieve is an easy to read and simple guide designed to help us all feel more comfortable with family, friends, or co-workers who are grieving. Loss is sometimes unexpected, and we find ourselves without the tools to be as supportive as we might wish to be.

The author of this book, Patricia, suffered through the brutal murder of her teen-aged daughter. As a bereaved mother, she soon became aware of how uncomfortable others were in her presence, but didn't know how to help them. This book deals with the difficulty many people experience trying to "get it right" in the presence of great grief. Through her own interaction with others during this terrible time, Patricia gained valuable insight into what is most helpful or hurtful. The result is this book containing the top seven ways to be more at ease with a bereaved person.

Patricia is a police officer, a mother of five living children, a certified "From Heartbreak to Happiness" coach, author and inspirational speaker. She reaches out to other bereaved parents and writes a blog, www.joyintheaftermath.com, dedicated to helping others find the joy in life after tragedy strikes.

This book is beautifully done and includes wonderful suggestions and examples from the author's personal experience. This truly is a must read for everyone.

Trish Morris, Grief Recovery Coach, Windsor Colorado

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