

## How to Respond When Someone Experiences a Loss

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AUTHORS: MEGAN BRONSON, PMH, CNS-BC, MSN, RN, CS & MEGAN TINNEY, PT, DPT

It can feel uncomfortable to offer support to someone who has experienced a loss. The American Cancer Society has some suggestions for how you could respond (with examples related to current events):

- Directly acknowledge what has happened so that the person you are talking to knows you are open to hearing and discussing the loss and their feelings:
  - "I know you're sad about missing graduation – you've worked really hard and it's disappointing not to be able to graduate with your friends. It's a big loss not to have that"
  - "I know that you're angry about our summer vacation plans getting cancelled this year. You have been looking forward to the trip and it's been taken away by something out of your control."
- Verbally share your concern and caring.
  - "I am so sorry to hear your husband has lost his job."
  - "It is so disappointing camp got cancelled this year. I am so sorry that you won't get to see your friends. I know seeing them on the computer won't be the same."
- Be sincere when you share your feelings and thoughts.
  - "I see that this is hard for you. I don't know what to say, but I want you to know I am here."
- Offer an invitation of support
  - "Is there anything I can do for you?"
  - "What is helpful for you right now?"
- Always ask how the person feels rather than assuming you already know.

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What if you find yourself in a situation in which you don't know how to respond?

- Don't be embarrassed if you are not able to think of anything to say. It will be a support for you to just be present with the person.
- Attend to what the person is saying, giving them your full attention without pressing for conversation.

Keep in mind that it will not be helpful to fill silence with sayings or clichés:

- "Everything happens for a reason"
- "Time heals all wounds"
- "Look at all that you have left to be thankful for"
- "At least you have your health"

Relax and listen. Don't get in a "fix-it" mode. Remember that each of us grieves differently, so avoid comparisons. You don't need to "cheer them up." You may simply need to be comfortable sitting with them without giving advice or passing judgment.