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Cecil Murphey and Liz Allison, co-authors of Words of Comfort for Times of Loss, offer the following suggestions to those who want to comfort and encourage their friends who have lost loved ones. As you read the list, many of the suggestions will depend on your relationship to the person in grief. If you don't know the person well, the authors suggest you focus on the first nine tips.

Practical Tips to Comfort and Encourage Those Who Grieve

1. Don't worry about what to say. Those in grief don't need words, but they need love and support during their bereavement.
2. Never say, "I understand exactly how you feel." You don't; no one does. If you feel you must say something, try this: "I don't know how you feel but I care about you." That's honest and it conveys the right message.
3. Listen more than you speak. Those who grieve may want to talk about their pain. They don't need opinions or advice. Become a safe haven where they can release their grief, vent, or say nothing.
4. Sit silently with the grieving. Many people try to fill the space with words when the hurting person needs only a warm body with a caring heart.
5. Don't hold to preconceived ideas about personal loss or the grieving process. Individuals grieve differently. Think of grieving as a sacred place and treat it that way without intrusion or instructions.
6. Here's a wrong question to ask: "What can I do for you?" They may not know and practical things may be beyond their thinking at the moment.
7. Don't say, "If there is anything I can do. . ." Unless you know something specific, keep silent. The question may add a burden to the grief-stricken person.
8. Don't discuss the feelings and/or information the grieving person has shared with anyone else.
9. If it seems important for you to communicate information, ask for permission. "May I tell. . . ?"
10. If you know the person well, make a list of work around the house or errands that others can do. Show the list to your loved one **before** you arrange anything.
11. Leave the list for others who visit and let them write their names if they want to do specific tasks. You can help others by providing a list of things they can volunteer to do.

12. Never assume the grieving person wants help; always ask first. If the person wants help, follow through and do it as soon as possible. Don't add aggravation to the pain.
 13. Help ensure that the person sets aside rest times and do what you can to protect the time from all visitors. Sleep and rest may not come easily, but it's needed to deal with the added stress of grieving.
 14. Give the person spiritual space. The grieving may need time to be alone. Ask, "Do you want time alone?" If the person says yes, volunteer to handle visitors or answer the phone during those periods or help arrange for someone else to do those tasks. In the midst of chaos and noise, the hurting person won't be able to hear God or receive divine comfort. Depending on their need, help them have quiet time to listen for God's gentle and loving voice.
 15. If little children are involved, ask if and how you can help care for them.
 16. Don't neglect the children. They may not understand everything and feel confused. If the children are old enough to communicate, listen to their concerns. Answer their questions simply and honestly.
 17. When appropriate, pray for (and with) your grieving friend or loved one. When the words come from your heart, the hurting person can sense your love. Don't expect the grieving person to pray aloud unless he or she indicates a desire to do so.
 18. Allow loved ones to feel and to express their emotions—no matter what they are. Grieving is like a wild roller coaster ride of ups and downs. Good friends learn to lead when needed or to take the back seat and go with them for the ride.
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Liz Allison was married to NASCAR driver Davey Allison until his tragic death in 1993. Widowed at 28 with two young children to raise, Liz faced the long journey of pain, loss, and grief with great faith. Committed to encouraging others, she returned to her work in TV reporting, has published eight books, and hosts a weekly radio show.

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Cecil Murphey is an international speaker and bestselling author who has written more than 100 books, including the *New York Times*' bestseller *90 Minutes in Heaven* (with Don Piper). No stranger himself to loss and grief, Cecil has served as a pastor and hospital chaplain for many years, and through his ministry and books he has brought hope and encouragement to countless people around the world.

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