

# PATHWAYS CENTER *for* GRIEF & LOSS

## HOW TO HELP A GRIEVING FRIEND

Those who are grieving need to know that someone is available to listen who will not judge or problem-solve. A willing ear and acceptance for *whatever* their feelings are is the greatest gift. The following are some suggestions for ways you can be helpful during this stressful time.

- Be there. Grieving friends need support and presence more than they need advice.
- Be observant. Actively listen to what they have to say.
- Be aware that the bereaved person is feeling very vulnerable. His or her self-esteem may be very low.
- Be alert to verbal as well as nonverbal communication. Watch for physical reactions to the death (lack of appetite, sleeplessness, headaches, inability to concentrate). These are normal reactions, but will affect your friend's coping ability, energy and recovery, especially over time. Use them as clues for how to support your friend.
- Be patient. Remember that they need to talk about the person who died. Important questions and concerns may take a while to come out. Your friend will grieve for months to come.
- Be honest. Honesty is important, and can be gently delivered.
- Be attentive. Adapt your responses to the situation. Prepare your friend for what to expect in the future. Offer specific ways you want to help.
- Be real. Share your experiences, as well as your tears.
- Be supportive and accepting, regardless of what feelings they express.
- Be helpful in practical matters such as running errands, preparing meals or offering childcare.
- Be hopeful. As difficult as it may appear to bear, *your* belief in your friend's ability to heal and grow may help that friend rediscover strengths and qualities that he or she had forgotten.
- Be honored - to be their friend at this critical time in their lives.

Be aware of your needs, as well as your limitations. Watch your own stress level; as you are trying to help others, take care of yourself.

