

How You Can Help Me

This letter was written by a woman who was recently widowed. It was edited by another widow. She personalized it and shared amongst friends and family:

Please talk about Chris, even though he is gone. It is more comforting to cry than to pretend that he never existed. I need to talk about him, and I need to do it over and over.

Be patient with my agitation. Nothing feels secure in my world. Get comfortable with my crying. Sadness hits me in waves, and I never know when my tears may flow. Just sit with me in silence and hold my hand.

Don't abandon me with the excuse that you don't want to upset me. You can't catch my grief. My world is painful, and when you are too afraid to call me or visit or say anything, you isolate me at a time when I most need to be cared about. If you don't know what to say, just come over, give me a hug or touch my shoulder, and say, "I'm sorry." You can even say, "I just don't know what to say, but I care, and want you to know that."

Just because I look good does not mean that I feel good. Ask me how I feel only if you really have time to find out. Also, I may not feel like getting into it at that particular time. It's exhausting some days.

I am not strong. I'm just numb and trying to do some of the things I used to. When you tell me I am strong, I feel that you don't see me.

I will not recover. This is not a cold or the flu. I'm not sick. I'm grieving and that's different. My grieving may only begin six months after Chris' accident. Don't think that I will be over it in a year. For I am not only grieving his death, but also the person I was when I was with him, the life we shared, the plans, the plans we had watching our children and grandchildren grow, the places we will never get to go together and the hopes and dreams that will never come true. My whole world has crumbled and I will never be the same.

I will not always be grieving as intensely, but I will never forget my Baby and rather than recover, I want to incorporate his life and love into the rest of my life. He is a part of me and always will be, and sometimes I will remember him with joy and other times with a tear. Both are okay.

I don't have to accept the death. Yes, I understand that it has happened and it is real, but there are some things in life that are just not acceptable.

When you tell me what I should be doing, then I feel even more lost and alone. I feel badly enough that Chris is dead, so please don't make it worse by telling me I'm not doing this right. Please don't tell me that I'm young and I can find someone else or that I need to start dating again. When and if I'm ready it'll be on my terms. And maybe I don't want to. And besides, what make you think people are replaceable? They aren't. Whoever comes after will always be someone different.

I don't even understand what you mean when you say, "You've got to get on with your life." My life is going on, I've been forced to take on many new responsibilities and roles. It may not look the way you think it should. This will take time and I will never be my old self again. So please,

just love me as I am today, and know that with your love and support, the joy will slowly return to my life. But I will never forget and there will always be times that I cry.

I need to know that you care about me. I need to feel your touch, your hugs. I need you just to be with me, and I need to be with you. I need to know you believe in me and in my ability to get through my grief in my own way, and in my own time.

Please don't say, "I don't know how you are getting through this. I could never do what you're doing." I have NO choice!!!! And don't say, "Call me if you need anything," I'll never call you because I have no idea what I need. Trying to figure out what you could do for me takes more energy than I have. So, in advance, let me give you some ideas:

- *Bring food or a movie over to watch together*
- *Send me a card on special holidays, his birthday, and the anniversary of his death, and be sure to mention his name. You can't make me cry. The tears are here and I will love you for giving me the opportunity to shed them because someone cared enough about me to reach out on this difficult day.*
- *Ask me more than once to join you at a movie or lunch or dinner. I may say no at first or even for a while, but please don't give up on me because somewhere down the line, I may be ready, and if you've given up then I really will be alone*
- *Understand how difficult it is for me to be surrounded by couples, to walk into events alone, to go up north alone, and to feel out of place in the same situations where I used to feel so comfortable.*

Please don't judge me now – or think that I'm behaving strangely. Remember I'm grieving. I may even be in shock. I am afraid. I may feel deep rage. I may even feel guilty. But above all, I hurt. I'm experiencing a pain unlike any I've ever felt before and one that can't be imagined by anyone who has not walked in my shoes.

Don't worry if you think I'm getting better and then suddenly I seem to slip backward. Grief makes me behave this way at times. And please don't tell me you know how I feel, or that you've had a horrible day/week/month simply because you've been busy, etc., or that it's time for me to get on with my life. What I need now is time to grieve.

Most of all, thank you for being my friend. Thank you for your patience. Thank you for caring. Thank you for helping, for understanding. Thank you for thinking of me.

And remember in the days or years ahead, after your loss – when you need me as I have needed you – I will understand. And then I will come and be with you.