

Dealing With Grief During The Holidays

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My husband and I attended a memorial service during the week of Thanksgiving. It was tough on both of us in different ways. Grief is a sorrowful journey, especially during the holidays.

When I learned I would lose my best friend to cancer, I read every expert's book I could find, about how to support her. I learned valuable lessons along that path. I learned grieving is an intensely personal journey, and the stages don't follow a linear path. When someone close to us loses a loved one, we don't want to be at a loss for words as we offer comfort.

Expressing condolences becomes even more important during the holidays, and special times focused on family and friends, when bereavement is felt particularly deeply. We always want those who are grieving to know that we support them. We

want to demonstrate both empathy and sympathy. Based on my deeply painful journey, I share the following thoughts:

Ask What They Need: Psychologists recommend asking what they need and following their request. If they say they need to be alone for a while, that's what they need. In our U.S. culture, people are direct, and they will tell you.

When those close to us shut down completely, and can't express what they need, offer to do things that must be done. Even though grief is debilitating, life's demands continue. Volunteer to make a master schedule or chart of who will run errands, do yard work, pay bills, feed and walk pets.

Remember That Food is Love: In many cultures, religions and belief systems, food plays a central role in the grief process. Bring food that can be enjoyed by guests, or frozen and enjoyed at a later time.

At the memorial service, use genuine words that reflect the authentic you: Select a few words, or a combination of words from the list below that genuinely reflect you. If you knew the deceased, it is kind to share a special memory that you enjoyed with them. The following phrases are offered as compassionate examples:

- Our deepest sympathies.
- God bless you in this difficult time.
- You are in our thoughts and prayers.
- You & your family are in our prayers.
- You are in my thoughts.
- We are thinking of you during this difficult time.
- Please accept my deepest sympathy.
- My sincere sympathies.
- Please accept our warmest condolences.
- My heartfelt condolences to you and your family.
- Please accept my sincere condolences.
- We are truly saddened to learn about the death of “_____”.
- Remember that we care about you.
- As you grieve, we will remember you.

- We'll always honor the memory of “_____”.
- Our hearts go out to you in your time of sorrow.
- We pray the love of God enfolds you during your journey through grief.
- Please accept my most heartfelt sympathies for your loss.
- My thoughts are with you and your family during this difficult time.

Sharon Schweitzer, J.D., is a cross-cultural consultant, an international protocol expert and the founder of Protocol & Etiquette Worldwide. She is accredited in intercultural management, is the resident etiquette expert for CBS Austin's We Are Austin, regularly quoted by BBC Capital, Investor's Business Daily, Fortune, The New York Times, and numerous other media. She is the best-selling, international award-winning author of Access to Asia: Your Multicultural Business Guide, named to Kirkus Review's Best Books of 2015 and recipient of the British Airways International Trade, Investment & Expansion Award at the 2016 Greater Austin Business Awards.