



FRIENDS CAN HELP

- **Keep in touch on a regular basis**
Don't abandon your friend. There may be times when your offers of help are refused. Try again later. If you feel awkward because you don't know what to do or say, be honest - "I don't know what to say... is there anything I can do?"
- **Listen to your friend's story - over and over again**
Listen without judging. Those who are bereaved will have intense feelings that are likely to include anger, sadness, fear and guilt. You cannot change this or take their pain away but you can help them by being there, caring and listening.
- **Send a note - if you don't know what to say, you can just write 'thinking of you'**
Share good memories of the person who died and what they meant to you.
- **Give your friend time to heal**
Don't expect that your friend or family member will be 'over it' in a few weeks or months. It may take years. Try to remember birthdays and other special days. Be aware that these may be particularly difficult times.
- **Offer to do something practical** such as making a meal, paying bills or doing the shopping or washing.
- **Offer to find out about resources and information for them**
Support your friend in accessing a counsellor if they are needing more help or have no 'good' days.
- **Be kind to yourself**
It can be draining to share your friend's loss. You also may be affected by this loss and have your own grief to deal with.
Take time to do some special things for yourself.
- **Here are some things that will not be helpful:**
 - Don't avoid talking about the person who has died. It may seem that you are denying they ever existed which can be very hurtful.
 - Don't use clichés such as "You must be strong" and "Life goes on."
 - Don't keep asking for details of the suicide.
 - Don't blame or give reasons to explain the suicide

"When there is something big, and uncertain to face, a comforting reassuring hand can help us overcome the anxiety we feel, allowing us to accomplish what we could never do alone."¹



This was written by someone after a suicide in their family to help you know what helps a survivor of this tragedy:

- Call immediately after the tragedy, but do not drop by unannounced.
- Telephone first; some may not want visitors.
- Do not ask for details or jump to any conclusions.
- If your initial call seems unwelcome, be forgiving and call later.
- What is important to the survivors is that you acknowledge the situation and let it be known that you care.
- Tell the survivors what the person meant to you.
- Recalling a good (and happy) story will be appreciated.
- Don't tell the survivor how the tragedy could have been prevented as it makes the survivor feel at fault.
- Do not place the blame on anyone.
- Let the survivor talk and be an attentive listener.
- Tell the survivor you are sorry this has happened, that life is sometimes very unfair – but never say, "It's probably all for the best." The family members of a suicide victim will not be comforted by these words.
- If you can't make a personal call, send a note.
- If you aren't sure what to say, "Thinking of you" will convey your message adequately.
- Do not hesitate to send a belated sympathy card or note if you failed to do so immediately. The survivor will appreciate being remembered even though your message was quite late.

The hurt of being ignored is very difficult to forget, I know.

A Survivor

¹ White-Bowden, S. (1987). *From a healing heart*. Maryland, USA: Image Publishing. ISBN