

What Do I Say? Basic Communication Skills

We are often expected to support each other in times of grief. You may worry that you will say “the wrong thing” in these circumstances. Your presence and compassion are the most important resources during this time.

The following is a list of basic communication skills to guide you in talking with others.

- **Use accurate language.** When referring to a death, for example, use “died” rather than *passed way*.
- **Expect others to talk about the event/loss** and their reactions and feelings.
- **Respect others’ confidentiality** – regardless of whether the details of a critical incident are widely known or the media have gotten involved.
- **Respect cultural and social diversity among your peers.** This is particularly important in times of crisis, when coworkers are more likely to talk about their personal values and beliefs.
- **Avoid statements** that, although well intended, may devalue someone else’s experiences or feelings. (see below)

Phrases to Avoid

“I know how you feel. I had the very same thing happen to me.”

“Everything will be just fine.”

“I’m sure he’s in a better place now.”

“It could’ve been worse. It’s not like it was a close relative or something.”

“I don’t understand why this is still bothering you. Everyone else seems to be handling this fine.”

Ways You Can Help

Avoid statements that begin with “You should” or “You will.” These statements are too directive. Instead you could begin your comments with: “Have you thought about. . .” or “You might. . .”

Don’t make decisions for your friend. You can help your friend make decisions by exploring the pros and cons of what or what not to do. If you make a decision and it ends up being a bad one, your friend may be very angry with you. Moreover, you may be reinforcing dependence on you.

Encourage expressions of grief. It is best to “encourage” your friend to express grief. If your friend begins to cry, do not change the subject; rather give a hug, make a pot of coffee, or find the tissue.

Encourage independence. The bereaved may tend to lean on you too much. It is better to gently encourage independence with your support and guidance.

Resources Are Available

Additional information, self-help tools and other resources are available online at www.FOH4YOU.com. Or call us for more information, help and support. Counselors are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to provide confidential assistance at no cost to you.



Employee Assistance Program

We Care, Just Call

1-800-222-0364

1-888-262-7848 TTY Users

www.FOH4YOU.com

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