



How to Help a Traumatized or Grieving Person

Unconditional, Supportive Listening: This is the ESSENTIAL SKILL.

Self-Awareness Regarding Personal Issues with Trauma: Try to be aware of and process your own issues so you don't prejudge what is emotionally real and conceptually true for others.

Tolerance of Others' Pain: Staying present to and accepting of the depth and range of pain that is there, rather than ignoring, or trying to talk or wish it away.

Be the Learner: Let them guide you towards their own ways of expressing and help them teach you about what is going on inside them.

Tolerance of Different Modes of Expression: Whether in identifying, expressing, and/or handling feelings and issues.

Creativity: Provide opportunities for especially young children but also others to express their beliefs and feelings through 'expressive media' – ranging from clay, drawing, poetry, journal keeping, letter writing, dance, photography, music listening or music making, to sand play and quiet time.

Honesty: Use real language ('he died'...) not euphemisms such as 'gone away', 'taken to heaven', etc. and tell the truth.

Patience: Encourage them to tell the same stories again and again until they don't need to anymore... at least for now.

Alertness and Flexibility: Stay alert and open to serendipitous, opportune times for listening, comment, quiet presence and intervention.

Trust Their Feelings: Be willing to surf with the range of emotions and behaviors they present... from huge and roiling to a need for solitude or a quiet presence. Remember that your job is not to help them to 'get over it' or 'around it' but to honor their journey 'through' trauma and grief as they find their own style and pace.... In the direction of hope and healing.

Sense of Perspective: Remember that everyone needs and deserves to be encouraged to take 'downtime' from traumatic grieving and this is especially true for children who literally need to play in order to absorb and pace their grieving.

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