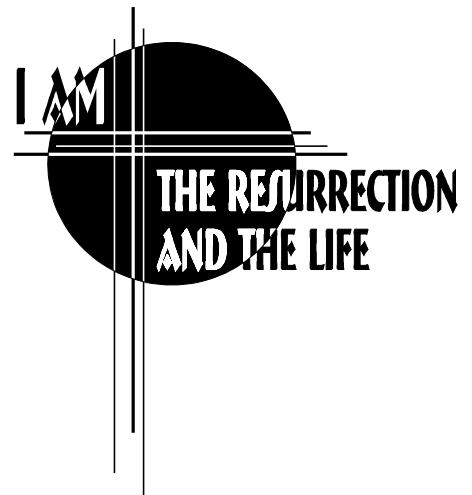


Practical ways to support a friend^{who} is grieving

“People do not get through a tragedy on their own. Each one needs to be surrounded by a loving, supportive group of family and friends. As someone who has been recently bereaved, I would like to offer from my experience the following tips for people who are helping their bereaved family members or friends.” (Lynn)

- Don't try to “cheer them up” or “make them feel better”. It will sound so meaningless. Simply “be” with the bereaved person and help with practical chores.
- Drop in a meal on a regular basis. Cooking a meal can become a huge effort. Make sure the meal is simple (not a hot curry dish) as the bereaved person is likely to be feeling nauseous much of the time.
- If the bereaved person has school children, make a loaf of sandwiches and put them in the freezer. It is hard enough to get out of bed, let alone make sandwiches.
- Take on a practical chore that needs doing. For example, clean the house or organise a cleaner. Fill the car with petrol, buy some basic grocery items or take in the washing. The everyday chores can become unmanageable and irrelevant for the bereaved.
- Don't talk too much. They will not be able to take in what you are saying.
- Let them talk if they want to. Let them cry if they want to. Let them be silent if they want to. (I have had people upset if I cried, and others upset if I didn't cry!)
- Do not say “How are you?” It seems a useless question when one is feeling like an absolute wiped-out, sad, empty mess. Say instead: ‘What have you done today?’ Or “How did you sleep?” or “I'm thinking of you.”
- If you invite the bereaved person for dinner, pick them up and drive them home. It's a huge effort to drive (and quite dangerous because they may not be able to concentrate).
- Instead of one large bunch of flowers, send a few small bunches once a fortnight for a while. After the funeral, the house will be initially filled with flowers, but then it will be bare. (Also...avoid those kinds of lillies that drop pollen all over the place - it's another chore to clean it all up!)
- Realise that the bereaved person will need your ongoing support for at least a year.
- When they feel ready, encourage them to talk to a bereavement specialist..
- Pray for the bereaved person.

From your life experience, share your own wisdom about how to best support a person who is grieving.





20 StressBusters

There are many stories of how people have coped with stress, yet people rarely tell them. I often wonder: what coping strategies did they use?

A prolonged stressful situation takes its toll on our minds, emotions and even our bodies. We may be grieving the loss of a loved one, caring for a family member who is ill, surviving a legal battle, a financial downhill spiral, living with an addictive or abusive partner, worrying about a child's lifestyle.

We all need a 'bag of strategies' to get through periods of great stress. Here are some of mine. (Lynn)

1. Eat well

The importance of a healthy diet cannot be overlooked. The body may cope with 'junk' food in the good times, but under great stress we must eat better than we have ever eaten before. Eat plenty of vegetables and fruit. Take a vitamin supplement if necessary. Consult a professional about your specific dietary needs.

2. Exercise

Exercise is a wonderful way to relieve stress and help the body recover its equilibrium. Try walking, swimming, running, cycling, dancing...

3. Yoga, Tai Chi.

Again, activities like these are healing for both mind and body.

4. Play music. Sing!

Listen to music, sometimes soft, calming music; at other times loud and 'boppy' music. Play your favourite songs over and over. Sing softly, sing loudly, with or without the radio.

5. Lighten up

Assign nicknames (not unkindly) to those who are adding to your stress. "Oh yes, I had a call from monster man."

6. Look at it as an event

See the stressful event as just that: an event. Just like you get up and go to the supermarket, get up and go to the hospital, or to the solicitor's office, or whatever it is you have to do. Some people find this a helpful way of taking the negative 'sting' out of a stressful experience.

7. Pray

Many people find great peace in praying and handing over the problem to a higher power. (The rosary is a favourite prayer of mine.)

8. Meditate

It is very difficult to stop the constant monkey chatter that goes on in your head when you are in the midst of a stressful situation. Practise meditation (ideally 20 minutes twice a day). Just stop, sit, eyes closed, and repeat a mantra. (It took me one year of practise to stop the monkey chatter for a few minutes. How special those few minutes were.)

9. Allow yourself to be hugged

Human touch is healing. Allow friends and family to hug you. Treat yourself to a massage.

10. Spend time with children

Their innocence in a stressful situation is refreshing.

11. Spend time with nature

Contemplating God's creation - a cool breeze, a ray of sunlight, a dew-tipped rosebud - can be mysteriously healing.

12. Read

Read what gives you life, insight, hope, healing.

13. Strengthen yourself mentally

Take control of negative thought patterns. Repeat simple affirmations like: "All will be well." "Everything in my life is working for my good". Repeat them two thousand times a day if necessary.

From a grief journal

Hello darling,

It is just over eight months since I saw you alive and oh I miss you. I feel like I have been drugged. My energy has gone, my enthusiasm has gone, my sparke has gone. I feel sapped. I feel terrified - emotionally and financially. I so much wanted a wonderful marriage with you - and now you are gone. My head constantly aches, every cell feels heavy. Even when I am smiling, I feel like I am crying inside. Stay with me my darling and show me what to do...

Hello darling,

I miss you. I played a tape the other day with that song "Wishing you were somehow here again." And oh boy! I've been aching for you ever since. I miss talking to you, I miss hearing your voice, I miss having your strength beside me. I constantly (well, 60% of the time) have a sick, nervous, butterfly feeling in my stomach. Tears are never far away. I have just heard a woman speak at a Conference about women's memoirs (their stories). I would love to write something to help others...but I find myself just focusing on putting one foot in front of the other and getting through the day...



From a grief journal

*Hello darling,
I am watching the TV showing the memorial services for the victims of the September 11 attacks in New York. I am fascinated. I am mesmerised. I want a glimpse of how people cope, how they turn a great sadness into a positive experience. How do people “rise” to the occasion? How do people heal? Oh my darling! I want to tell you that one of the ways I am coping is because people around me have been extraordinarily kind. Their generosity and kindness has moved me tremendously. It has touched my heart and the “goodness” around me is extremely uplifting. In the last nine months I have been given money, a TV, advice, a facial, lifts to places and invitations to gatherings... and more. Thank you, darling.
Surround me with love.*

14. Visualise the future
Picture the future in positive terms. Don't be afraid to daydream about the beautiful, lifegiving possibilities that could open up before you.

15. Keep a sense of humour
Laughter, like exercise, releases endorphins which bring relief to the body's stressful state.

16. Seek assistance
A good counsellor (or a spiritual companion/guide) can help you come to new insights as well as 'push' you through the pain, which sometimes seems impossible to do by yourself.

17. Breathe
Breathing - correctly - is absolutely vital! Anxiety is increased when we breathe shallowly. As you breathe in, feel air going right into your belly, and let your belly move out as you breathe in. (Yes, that's right, your belly moves out as you breathe in.) Then allow your belly to move in as you breathe out.

18. Share a meal
Over a meal share with friends what you are up to. Don't overburden them, but be authentic about how you feel. Sometimes you have to choose carefully your mark as to how much you open up and to whom.

19. Write
Be creative. Write a poem or a song about what you are experiencing. Or simply write down how awful you feel and why. Getting it down on paper helps to get it out of your body.

20. Rest
When you are under stress it is very tiring. Take the extra rest and sleep you need.
Be conscious of relaxing your shoulders and your jaw. These are hot spots of tension and get very tight and almost feel like they are 'locked'. So make a conscious effort to lower your shoulders and relax your bottom jaw.

Grieving as Christians

As Christians we know that when we grieve we do so in the context of an extraordinary hope: no suffering can ever eclipse God's great love for us. Death is not the end. With Christ we rise to new life; the power of the Spirit will not abandon us. As a Catholic community we have rich resources that celebrate and deepen the healing journey of our lives. These include:

Scripture

In the sacred stories of our ancestors in faith we find so many people who have suffered like us, and who placed their hope and trust in God.

Sacraments

In the sacraments of Baptism, the Eucharist, Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick the Church celebrates the healing, liberating actions of Christ and invokes the lifegiving gift of the Holy Spirit.

Symbols

The hard wood of a cross, the refreshment of water, the soothing effect of oil... symbols can cut through our pain and 'speak' to us in ways that elude verbal discourse.

Prayer

The traditional prayers of the church (e.g. the Our Father, the rosary, the psalms) can be a great strength in times of stress. When we can't find the words within ourselves we need only rest in the prayer of the church and let the faith of the saints carry us.

A sacred sense of time

For Christians, *time* has a redemptive quality. Each day brings us closer to our eternal destiny, fullness of life with God. Each Friday is a mini-celebration of Good Friday. Each Sunday is a 'mini-Easter'. This weekly cycle of death-resurrection brings a special perspective to all life's joys and sorrows.

Our people

The Catholic community has a strong network of personnel and groups that can offer spiritual, emotional and financial help to people who are under stress. Your local parish can put you in touch with the right person.