

How Your Words Can Complicate My Grief

Thank you for trying to help me during my grief. I need to let you know some of the things you do and say that can make my grief harder for me:

When you tell me to be strong in my grief and stop crying, I worry that my grief makes me look weak to others. The truth is that it takes courage to face the reality of loss and to express my emotions in healthy, appropriate and constructive ways.

When you tell me that I need to get busy and get my mind off my loss, you make me feel like grief is something bad to be avoided. The truth is I need to process the loss in healthy ways and move toward healing.

When you tell me to quit talking about my grief because no one wants to hear about it, I become reluctant to share my thoughts or feelings with anyone. I don't want to burden other people or make them feel uncomfortable with my grief. The truth is I need to review my loss and how it has impacted my life in order to pick up the pieces of my life and move on. Telling my grief story is therapeutic for me.

When you tell me you thought I would be doing better or be over my grief by now, I feel guilty and that something may be terribly wrong with me. The truth is that grief is a natural response to the loss of someone significant in life. Grief cannot be rushed through. Grief is a process, not an event.

When you tell me that if I had more faith that I wouldn't struggle with grief so much, you add to my guilt and stress. Part of that stress may be a concern that I and my grief are not pleasing to God. The truth is that no matter what you believe or how strongly you believe it, you are not exempt from the grief experience and all its emotions.

When you tell me that I should be happy that my loved one is in a better place or that they are no longer suffering, you make me feel selfish for missing them. The truth is I can be happy for them and sad for myself at the same time. The truth is simply I long to be in my loved one's presence.

When you tell me that life must go on, you make me feel resentful toward you and life. The truth is that I am going on with my life in the best way I know how. What more do you and life want out of me?

When you tell me that I need to forget my loved ones and leave them in the past, I feel like you're asking me to act as if they never existed and their lives weren't important. The truth is my grief is because of my ongoing love for them and their value to me. All the grief emotions I experience and all the mourning behavior I display are in honor of their meaningful lives.

When you tell me that all things happen for a reason or that the death is God's will, you make me question my grief, my life, my spirituality and my sanity. The truth is that you or any other human being cannot provide me or any other mourner with the answers to questions that come with a loved one's death. You are simply saying something to make yourself feel comfort.

I know you mean well and that you want to help and support me in my grief. I need you to quit trying to come up with answers to my questions. I need you to talk less and listen more without judging or giving unsolicited advice. I need you to let me know that you have heard me and are trying to understand me and my grief. Please quit trying to fix me and simply be there for me.

Written by Larry M. Barber, LPC-S, CT author of the grief survival guide "Love Never Dies: Embracing Grief with Hope and Promise." (<http://griefminister.com/2015/07/07/how-your-words-can-complicate-my-grief/>)