Helping Someone Through the Grieving Process

How can we help someone through this painful, but necessary process? Whether we are spouses, siblings, co-workers, friends or professionals, it is important to remember that grieving is a highly individual process. Because it is a process we must allow the grieving person to go through it at their own pace. This pace will vary according to the nature of the loss, the setting in which the loss occurs, and the individual characteristics of the person experiencing the loss. However, there are some specific things we can do to help someone through the grieving process:

• **Provide Support.** Your presence, a handshake or a hug will provide more support than any “rehearsed remarks” that you could possibly think of.

• **Try to Avoid Cliches.** Such as “time heals”, “you’ll get over it”, or “I know how you feel.”

• **Offer Specific Help.** Ask your friend what they need, rather than saying something vague like “let me know if you need anything.”

• **Be Yourself.** Show your own natural concern and sorrow in your own way and in your own words. Don’t withdraw from responding to another’s loss for fear of doing or saying the “wrong thing.”

• **Accept Silence.** Don’t force conversation. Silence is better than aimless chatter. Learn to be comfortable with silence and just “being” with the person.

• **Be a Good Listener.** This is probably the most important thing you can do. When suffering spills over into words, you can do the one thing the bereaved needs above all else at that time. YOU CAN LISTEN. Accept whatever feelings are expressed. Let them tell you their story over and over again. It is in telling the story that survivors are able to begin the healing process.

• **Do Not Attempt to Tell the Bereaved How He or She Feels.** You can ask, but you cannot know, except as he/she tells you. LEARN from the mourner; do no instruct him/her.
• **Do Not Probe for Details About the Death.** If the survivor offers information, listen with understanding. Share some positive memories with the survivor.

• **Encourage the Postponement of Major Decisions Until After the Period of Intense Grief.** Whatever can wait, should wait.

• **When the Survivor Returns to Social Activity, Treat Him or Her as a Normal Person.** Avoid pity – it destroys respect. Don’t be discouraged. With your love and support, he/she will gain the strength to continue on.

• **A Final Thought:** Helping must be more than following a few guidelines. Especially if the bereavement is devastating and you are close to the bereaved, you may have to give more time, more care, more of yourself than you imagined. Helping someone through the grieving process can be fulfilling for both the grieving person and the person helping. It is a process and people experience this process in different ways. Different doesn’t mean wrong, it just means different.

This information is provided by the Colorado State Employee Assistance Program (C-SEAP). C-SEAP can be reached by calling (303) 866-4314 or 1-800-821-8154.