

WHAT NOT TO SAY TO PEOPLE EXPERIENCING A LOSS

1. Statements that negate or avoid feelings:

- I know how you feel.
- Time heals all wounds. (It doesn't.)
- You will get over this.
- You must go on with your life.
- He didn't know what hit him.
- You can always find someone worse off than yourself.
- You must focus on your precious memories.
- It's better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all.

All of these statements say: "I'm not comfortable with you like you are. I need to make it better so I will feel better."

2. Disempowering Statements:

- You don't need to know that.
- What you don't know won't hurt you.
- I can't tell you that. (If you can't tell, then explain why you can't, and when they can expect to have an answer.)

3. References to God:

- It must have been his/her time.
- He/she is in a better place now.
- Someday you'll understand why.
- It was actually a blessing because _____.
- God must have needed him/her more than you did.
- God never gives us more than we can handle.
- Only the good die young.

If survivors use their own faith beliefs to comfort themselves, that is fine. But, we should not burden them with our views.

4. Unhealthy Expectations:

- You must be strong for your parents/friends/classmates.
- You've got to get a hold of yourself.

5. Additional Statements NOT to Make:

- Don't worry, you will make more friends.
- You're young, you'll get over this.
- You just have to forget he/she ever existed.
- Don't talk about it.
- Be brave! Don't cry!

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- I'm so sorry.
- It's harder than most people think.
- I'm glad you're talking.
- Your reaction is a normal response to such an unexpected event.
- If I were in your situation, I'd feel very _____, too.
- You are safe now (if they actually are).
- It wasn't your fault (if you are sure it wasn't).
- Most people who have gone through this react similarly to what you are experiencing.
- It is understandable that you feel that way.
- You are not crazy.
- Things may never be the same again, but it will not always hurt this bad.
- Your imagination can sometimes make a horrible reality worse than it is, so ask people questions about what you don't know, and ask people to be honest with you.
- I'll check back with you tomorrow to see how you are doing. (BE SURE TO DO IT!)

PHRASES TO ENCOURAGE DIAGLOGUE ABOUT THE LOSS

- I remember "this" or "that" about _____. Tell me about him/her. What are you going to miss about him/her?
- I've never had this experience. Help me understand how you feel.
- Let me know when you want to talk about it. I'll be ready to listen.
- What is the worst part about this?
- What do you need right now, at this very moment?
- It must have been really upsetting/distressing to see, hear, feel...Tell me about what this was like for you.
- Do you have any questions?
- I don't know. What do you think?
- What can you tell me about this?
- Where were you/what were you doing when you heard the news?

