

A friend has recently lost a loved one and you hate seeing the pain the grief is causing them. You want to love them and support them through this time, but you don't want to overwhelm them. You want them to know you're there, but you're afraid of doing the wrong thing. How do you help a grieving friend?

## THIS IS SUCKER PUNCHED

If I have learned anything from single parenthood and living with chronic pain and fatigue, it's that I have to delegate. There have been many days when I just can't make dinner and we are out of easy meals, so I let DoorDash do the cooking. We have a few favorite places to order from and we always order a little extra so we have leftovers. With DoorDash you can also get groceries and save on fees when you join DashPass. Pro tip: if you use Honey for online coupons, you can get door dash gift cards instead of cash as your pay out! Get \$10 off your first 3 orders when you sign up through [BeckyLMcCoy.com/DoorDash](https://BeckyLMcCoy.com/DoorDash)

When someone we love has experienced loss, it feels overwhelming to know how to help. We don't want to say the wrong thing. We want to be helpful. We want them to know we love them dearly. We know different people grieve differently and have different needs, but how do we know? We don't want to interrupt their grief, so we end up just staying quiet or offering to help, reminding them to reach out if they need anything. And when we don't hear from them, we assume their needs are all being met or that they are feeling better.

If you've ever been the griever, you know how frustrating this approach to grief care is. When you're grieving, the last thing you can do is remember who has offered help if you need it. You're not even sure what you need or how to ask. Your grief is overwhelming and helping other people to help you feels impossible and counterproductive. You're lonely and feel forgotten, but you're afraid of being a burden or making a request no one can fulfill.

So, how do we care for a grieving friend when there's such a disconnect? Here are six things I tell people who want to support a grieving friend:

### **1. Communicate clearly**

Our culture tends to use a lot of euphemisms when it comes to grief. When we feel awkward, we talk around the topic instead of addressing it directly. Instead of vaguely offering help or expressing concern, say exactly what you mean.

“I love you and I’m so sorry for your loss.”

“I don’t know what to say.”

“I want to support you but I don’t know how.”

“I just want you to know that I love you and am thinking of you.”

### **2. Offer specific ways to help**

When you want to provide help that’s actually helpful, it’s tempting to tell someone to ask for what they need. But sometimes even that is too much of a burden to give to the griever. Instead, offer a few very specific ways you can help so you give them a simpler choice.

“Would it be more helpful for you if I come clean the bathroom or bring coffee and sit with you?”

“I have a free afternoon - can I come do some laundry or take the kids to the park?”

“I’m making twice the amount for dinner, can I bring you the extra?”

“Heading to the grocery store later. Need anything?”

### **3. Get in touch and make it clear you don’t expect a response**

When you think of your grieving friend, let them know! A quick “thinking of you” text or an email with some life updates can be such a gift to someone who is grieving and feeling disconnected and lonely. A voicemail just reminding them you love them. A note in the mail. However you keep in touch, keep it about reminding them you care about them since they may or may not have the capacity to respond. I saved notes and letters from people for years after my husband died because the stack of cards reminded me I wasn’t the only one missing him. I responded to almost none of them, but they were a lifeline.

### **4. Ding dong ditch**

This is a favorite way to love friends going through a difficult season. Whenever I see something that makes me think of them or might bring them some comfort, I grab it. It could be a bunch of small things from the dollar store or Target dollar spot or one or two more moderately priced things. I drop it off at

my friend's front door and ring the doorbell or text to let them know there's a surprise I hope they enjoy. I make it clear I don't expect to be invited in or wait to let them know til I'm already gone so they don't feel pressure. If I don't have much extra time, I'll randomly text them a gift card for coffee or a meal delivery. It doesn't have to be much, just a little something to remind them they aren't forgotten or alone.

### **5. Respect the boundaries and requests they make**

It might seem obvious, but it's worth the reminder. If they have made a specific request or set a particular boundary, it's important to respect it. They may have said "no meals, please" because their freezer is already full; if you drop off a meal, even with the best intentions, they now have to figure out how and where to store the food until they're ready to eat it. Follow the grieving person's lead. If they want to go do something fun, don't question it. If they need a lot of space and quiet, don't try to convince them to go out. You might think they need something different, but people handle grief differently and that's okay.

### **6. Be aware of what orbit in their life you fit into**

Some of the caring for grieving people is best left to the people in the person's closest circle. Some tasks are easier for those who aren't as closely associated to the loss. Before jumping in to help, take a moment to be thoughtful about your relationship with the person who is grieving. If you wouldn't have offered to do their laundry before, maybe send a gift card for a favorite restaurant instead. If you aren't sure how close you are to someone, keep it simple: don't check in every day or every week, but do regularly let them know you're thinking of them. As time passes, it might become clearer what you can offer them.

For a few books to help you feel less alone in your grief, check out [BeckyLMcCoy.com/GriefLibrary](https://BeckyLMcCoy.com/GriefLibrary)

You'll find any links mentioned, along with a full transcript of this episode at [BeckyLMcCoy.com/podcast/89](https://BeckyLMcCoy.com/podcast/89)

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If you found this episode encouraging or helpful, share it with a friend and remember: when in doubt, tell someone you're thinking of them. You're doing great.