

# How Can I Help?

Someone you work with... someone you know... has died. Regardless of the circumstances, as a person wishing to give support you may feel empty and helpless. What can you say that will ease the pain and help to mend the hurts?

## *What Can You Do to Help?*

There are no easy answers, no standard approaches that are universally helpful. There are no magic formulas that will make the pain go away. It is natural to feel helpless when someone dies. Remember that showing your concern can be very comforting to them. Please don't avoid them because you feel inadequate. Individuals are more likely to reach a healthy, positive resolution of their grief if they receive continuing support and understanding. The following suggestions may help you provide that support:

— Don't try to find magic words that will take away the pain. There aren't any. A hug, a touch, and a simple, "I'm so sorry," offer real comfort and support.

— Don't be afraid to cry if you feel like crying. Your tears are a tribute to your relationship that you have had with the caregiver. Yes, the person may cry with you, but their tears could be a healthy release.

— Be patient. Understand that each of us responds differently to when we receive painful news. Some verbalize, others may seem unable or unwilling to talk, some withdraw, and others strike out angrily.

— Avoid saying, "*I know how you feel.*" It is very difficult to comprehend what they are feeling; to do so may seem presumptuous to them even if you have been in their place before.

— Avoid using clichés such as "*It was God's will*" and others that attempt to minimize or explain their loss. Don't feel you have to find something positive in the situation by saying such as "*At least \_\_\_\_\_.*" There are no words that make it "all right". Their feelings of loss are part of life that must be lived fully and not trivialized away.

— Listen! Let them express the anger, the questions, the pain, the disbelief, and the guilt they may be experiencing. Understand that they often have a need to talk and the circumstances of this experience more than once.

— Avoid judgments of any kind. "*You should . . .*" or "*You shouldn't . . .*" is not appropriate or helpful.

— Be aware that for anyone with religious convictions this experience may raise serious questions about God's role in this event. Do not presume to offer answers. If they raise the issue, it would be better to listen and allow them to explore their own feelings. They will need to arrive at an individual philosophy about this.

— If able, share fond memories of your times together. Don't be afraid of laughter. It helps to heal the hurt.