

TIPS FOR FAMILY & FRIENDS[©]

How can I be supportive?

by Terry L. Wise, J.D., www.TerryWise.com/Resources

- **BE AWARE OF THE IMPACT OF YOUR STATEMENTS.**
Learn to say things that are helpful or neutral, not hurtful.
Suggestions:
“I wish I had the right words, just know that I care.”
“I don’t know how you feel, but I am here.”
- **AVOID RESPONSES THAT BEGIN WITH “AT LEAST...”**
There may be situations that would have been worse, but this reply can deprive people of the right to their feelings.
- **RECOGNIZE & ACKNOWLEDGE CAREGIVERS.**
Caregivers for those with physical *and* mental health conditions are often overlooked populations. Even if you get the knee-jerk reaction, “I’m fine”, simply asking them how they are doing, or acknowledging that the situation they are in must be difficult for them, too, can make a world of difference.
- **UNDERSTAND THAT GESTURES & ACTIONS CAN BE JUST AS HELPFUL,**
and sometimes more helpful, as verbal statements.
Suggestions: Stop by with prepared meals, walk pets, offer child care or car-pooling, pick up prescriptions, pitch in for a cleaning service, water plants, administrate medical or other bills, locate a therapist or support group, *be present and offer companionship*.
- **PREFACE YOUR COMPLAINTS WITH AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THEIR SITUATION.** A simple recognition can be extraordinarily meaningful.
Suggestion: “I can’t imagine what you are going through. I can’t even deal with ...”
- **CHECK-IN WITH THEM BEFORE LAUNCHING INTO YOUR OWN PROBLEMS (OR YOUR GOOD NEWS!).**
This lessens the risk of alienating people who may otherwise think, “I am dealing with so much. How can s/he complain to me about xyz?”
Suggestion: “I’m sure you don’t want to hear about my problems (or about my good news). You have enough on your plate.”
- **AVOID “ONE-DOWNING” or the “SUFFERING OLYMPICS.”**
(e.g. don’t respond with, “*You think that’s bad, listen to this...*”).
- **OFFER TO FORM A VOLUNTEER GROUP** of family, friends, neighbors, or others to share the care of (or to provide support to) those confronted with physical *and* mental health conditions. Create a list of tasks and develop a rotation schedule. This is a useful tool for providing support to those who are bereaved, too.

- **CREATE A LIST OF THE MOST PIVOTAL AND INFLUENTIAL STATEMENTS EVER MADE *TO YOU* AND CONSIDER USING THEM TO HELP OTHERS.**
Examples: “It wasn’t your fault.” “Your pain may never become less intense, but it will become less frequent.” “Peace doesn’t come from not feeling. It comes from being able to manage your feelings.”
- **REMAIN ACCESSIBLE & *CONTINUE TO REMIND* them of your availability.**
- **ACTIVELY LISTEN. LET THEM TELL THEIR STORY**—even if it is multiple times.
- **ALLOW THEM TO EXPRESS ANGER AND FRUSTRATION** (e.g. at fate, at themselves, at others, at phone menu systems) **AND** help them channel and manage it appropriately.
- **ALLOW THEM *NOT* TO EXPRESS THEIR EMOTIONS** if they are not ready.
- **AVOID USING TERMS LIKE “BRAVE” AND “STRONG” TO DESCRIBE THOSE WHO ARE NOT CRYING OR EXPRESSING PAIN OR ANGER.**
This can potentially foster the *misperception* that crying or expressing certain emotions is a sign of personal weakness and therefore, may encourage internalization of feelings.
- **AVOID MAKING STATEMENTS OR TELLING PERSONAL STORIES THAT FOSTER ALIENATION** (e.g. don't claim to know exactly what they are going through).
- **DON'T BE AFRAID OF REMINDING THEM** of their crisis, situation, or loss. It is likely to be on their mind anyway.
- **REMEMBER TO CONTACT THEM & OFFER SUPPORT** and companionship on anniversaries, holidays, birthdays & other special dates.
Suggestion: Mark your calendar one week prior so you can send a card to be received on that date.
- **HELP THEM LAUGH. HELP THEM CRY. STIMULATE EMOTIONAL RELEASES.**
- ***BE THERE LATER WHEN OTHERS HAVE RETURNED TO THEIR LIVES.***

**Please visit www.TerryWise.com/Resources
FOR FREE DOWNLOADABLE VERSIONS OF THESE MATERIALS**



THE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES CONTAINED IN THIS DOCUMENT ARE *NOT* INTENDED AS A SUBSTITUTE, SUPPLEMENT, OR REPLACEMENT OF COMPETENT MEDICAL, LEGAL, OR MENTAL HEALTH CARE. *ALWAYS CONSULT MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS, PHYSICIANS, AND SEEK LEGAL ADVICE TO ENSURE AGAINST POTENTIAL FINANCIAL LIABILITY, RISKS, OR DETRIMENTAL EFFECTS TO YOUR EMOTIONAL OR PHYSICAL HEALTH.*
