

Ten Alternatives to *Let me know if there's anything I can do*

1. Please don't offer to help if you aren't going or able to follow up. Be impeccable with your offer, I understand that it's uncomfortable to watch someone suffer. Not everyone is equipped to hold the space of sorrow for someone else, it's hard enough to hold it for ourselves. Sometimes listening to the same questions and death story is too much reality to handle. Just know your limits and do what you can but only if you can.
2. Pause before you speak. If you don't know what to say, it's okay to just say that. Often we speak out of discomfort and end up saying all the wrong things, or worse nothing at all, all be it not intentionally. When we are scared and feeling vulnerable, we don't always think straight. It's helpful to remember that during grief a person is hypersensitive, hyperemotional and even hypervigilant. When you pause ask yourself – will what I say be helpful for them? If you aren't sure you can do one of two things. One don't say anything at all except I don't know what to say or two ask them – would it be helpful if...?
3. Be honest. Brene Brown a famous author says share what's vulnerable not what's intimate. Phrases like I'm at a loss for words, I don't know how I can help, or I'm really uncomfortable not knowing what to do; are ways to verbalize your own vulnerabilities. Adding anything else after that runs the risk of you giving unsolicited advice, invalidating the person or worse comparing losses.
4. Ask permission. Would it be okay if – ex. I checked in with you at the end of the week, month, quarter? If yes, plan accordingly. If no, respect the decision and perhaps try again at another time.
5. Give permission. If you ever don't want to ... – ex. please just stop me or let me know, a simple I can't right now is good enough for me and I won't be offended at all.

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6. Take the time to be thoughtful and kind. Observe what the person likes, dislikes, the lifestyle they have and what has helped them get through difficult moments in the past. If they are vegan you wouldn't offer them a piece of steak you'd share some seasonal fruits and vegetables.
7. If you say something wrong stop and recognize the error. We have all done it, open mouth insert foot. Stop immediately and atone by recognizing your error, keeping silent only makes the hurt worse. Try this –Gosh I feel terrible that I just said that, it was insensitive and thoughtless, I'll try to do better can you forgive me?
8. Just be present. Sometimes there is nothing for you to do or say. In those moments just being there is enough. You don't need to fix things or do anything. Don't make it awkward just let them know you are thinking of them and remind them that you are there not to hash up the past or plan for the future just to sit and companion them for the moment. If you can't be physically there, send a card.
9. Try the small stuff. Practice random acts of kindness. It's not what you say or do that matters but the intention and the small gestures that are remembered. Remember what I said above about the bereft asking for help? One thing that keeps them from asking is that they feel like a burden. Pick something small to do and go with it, don't over think it.
10. Listen for understanding. We have inadvertently trained ourselves to listen to respond. It's a hard thing to sit in sacred silence. Our giving nature wants to be helpful, to do something, to fix things or give advice on what's worked for us and others. It feels counterintuitive to take the focus off of ourselves and to keep it on the other person. Something else we tend to do naturally is be curious, that leads to a lot of questions seeking answers or details of what happened. Asking for the details though can bring up more hurt, try to refrain from asking what happened. That information will come. I know this takes practice and it is completely doable. Learning the art of listening opens up the relationship for intimate conversations with trust, love and support. The goal of listening is attuning. The goal of attuning is to just understand.

Ideas to "do" *when you want to be helpful*

One way to focus on what to do for the bereft is to go back to the basics. As human beings we all need to attune to our physiological needs. Things like food, water, warmth and rest. While these are the most basic of our needs, when in grief these are the first to suffer. It helps when a supportive circle makes these a little less of a challenge. Here are some areas to consider.

Food delivery – Food seems to be the number one answer when I have asked the bereft what they found helpful during the first few weeks and the first year after losing a loved one. It doesn't matter if you cook a meal, make a food delivery rotation with family, friends and neighbors, provide a delivery service or gift a series of gift cards to local favorites. Some have even taken up the grocery shopping. What matters is that the bereft gets some nourishment.

Cleaning service – Cleaning tends to go out the window for many. There just isn't enough energy, time or the desire to vacuum, sweep, mop, much less do laundry or throw out the trash. Hiring a reputable cleaning service, car detailer or just offering to come by and contribute in these household task is an enormous help. Just make sure you know and understand what are the no go zones; ex. the deceased closet, laundry, personal effects, etc.

Lawn care – For those who have a garden or a yard this has been another area that has been overlooked. You can hire someone to cut the lawn, trim the trees and edges or pull weeds or you can diy this. This is also an activity where the neighbors can pitch in and schedule a rotation.

Car care – Cars need regular maintenance so it makes sense that one would check the tire pressure, have a tire rotation or even have the oil changed. Something as simple as filling up a person's tank is a thoughtful gesture.

Kid care – For those who have a family and children. It is helpful to give the bereft a break by taking care of the children. A few hours to play at the park, go see a movie or do a craft together is a welcome distraction and a moment of rest for all those involved. The amazing thing about children is that simple activities like reading or blowing bubbles doesn't cost much. This is a great opportunity to get creative.

Self-care – Physical touch is something that we all need. Hugs, pats, and having someone sit next to us is very comforting. It allows us to feel connected, it creates warmth and it reminds us that we are worthy, loved and alive. Manicures, pedicures, facials and massages are great ways to receive healthy touch while recharging and allowing the space for self-care. A simple shampoo and style can do the trick too.

The wonderful thing about choosing to do any of the above examples is that it doesn't have to break the bank or consume a lot of your time. Each of these are things are offers you can diy, hire out or rotate with others.