



Pathways through Grief

Part of the Grief Information Series from Spicer-Mullikin Family Aftercare Services

A Letter to My Family and Friends

My dear ones:

I know that I haven't been myself and haven't been the easiest person in the world to be with since _____ died. Being left behind has been so much harder than I expected and now I have to go on by myself, without my beloved. Please don't give up on me. Right now, and perhaps for a long time to come, I will need all the patience, love, and understanding I can get.

I didn't expect it to be like this. I've always thought of myself as a strong person, someone who could get things done and be there to help others. In fact, I'm so used to giving help that I don't know how to ask people to do things for me. It has always felt good to be the helper, the strong, capable one, and I needing to get used to the idea of myself as a person in need. That doesn't feel so good; now I realize that during all those years of being strong, I was being given a gift of good feelings about myself as I helped those who I thought were less fortunate than I.

But now it's me who is hurting. I can't seem to get myself pulled together enough to do even the simple things that need to be done every day. I guess that's partly because I don't care much about anything anymore. I miss my beloved so much that my sadness is about all I can think about. Ordinary stuff like eating and taking care of the house just doesn't matter. Some days I can barely drag myself out of bed—and the effort to get washed and dressed takes me almost all morning. I find myself standing, staring out the bedroom window watching robins on the lawn. But I'm not really watching them. I'm lost in a dream world where my loved one still lives and we are enjoying being together again. But then I realize that it's a dream world and I've been

standing there for a very long time. And I don't care that it's spring, don't care about the birds and flowers. In fact, I almost hate the spring time; how can things be so alive and brightly colored when the one I love is dead? The whole world should have stopped; my whole world has stopped.

I'm sorry that I really can't think much about you and what is going on in your world or what you might need right now. I don't even know if I'll ever let myself care about anyone again. Love hurts so much when the one you love dies; I don't know if it is worth it. There are so many things I wish I'd said when we were both alive. If we could have just one more hug! I didn't realize that our last hug would have to last for a lifetime. I need hugs so very much right now.

You said you'd like to help me, but you don't know what I need. Let me give you some ideas:

Don't say "Call me if you need anything." Just call or stop by. You'll be able to tell by my response whether I want to talk right then. Please don't say, "I'll call you," unless you are really going to do it. I don't have the energy to call you or anyone else right now.

Please don't say, "Let's go out to dinner," but leave it up in the air. I can't choose a date or think about restaurants—it's too easy to get into memories of when my loved one and I went out to dinner together. You suggest a date and a place.

Offer to go to church with me. I'm feeling mixed up about God right now. Let me know that it's OK if I cry there.

Remind me of the good and fun or funny times. I may cry but the tears release the sadness that is always with me. I need to know that other people loved, valued, and enjoyed my loved one. Tell me about things that I might not know about—give me new memories to enjoy.

Offer to run an errand for me. Take my clothes to the dry cleaner when you take yours or bring me some fresh vegetables when you go to the market for yourself.

Send me a note in the mail. A "thinking of you" note means a lot on a day when I'm feeling so lonely it seems that nobody anywhere cares if I live or die.

Support whatever I do or don't do about visits to the cemetery. If I go often, know that I'm finding comfort and closeness there. If I don't go, know that I'm not comfortable there and I have other ways to honor the person I love.

Let me tell you that I wish I were dead, because then I'd be with _____. Don't get upset and tell me that I don't really mean it. I do mean it, but I'm not going to do anything to myself. It's just a way of saying how miserable and hopeless I'm feeling.

Understand that I can't imagine having a good time ever again or laughing about anything. The one I love has died and will have no more laughter or fun. If other people saw me socializing or laughing they might think I didn't really love my beloved.

Give me a hug when you don't know what to say. You might even say, "The right words don't come to me now, but maybe a hug would let you know I care. Would you like a hug?"

Believe that as time goes by I will feel better—but don't try to tell me that now. I can't believe it.

Thank you for caring. This may be the worst time in my whole life. I certainly can't imagine how I could hurt more. But it helps a whole lot to know that you and others love me and will stay part of my life.

Love, Me

P. S. When I'm ready, allow me to find love again. I learned how to love with my beloved. A new love would be a tribute to the relationship we had, not a disloyalty. Also please be ready to accept without judgment any changes I may make in myself or my life. I may need to be a changed person to live a changed life.

More Suggestions for Family and Friends

*When we first presented "A Letter to My Family and Friends" in the **PATHWAYS** newsletter, we invited readers to offer other suggestions for those who want to help people in grief. One reader's additions are follow:*

Ask me to go somewhere or do something with you. I may be ready to go or do, but don't have the wherewithal to think of where or what. And be specific about the date, time, and destination/activity. I may be ready to shop at the mall or have lunch at McDonald's, but not ready for a visit to a place with memories of my loved one or for a party with lots of our mutual friends or for any big gathering.

Even if I keep turning down your well-intentioned efforts, keep trying. Every moment, every day is different for me. And totally unpredictable.

Realize that, since my beloved has died, one of the most overwhelming aspects of my life is loneliness. We were together for so long (it sometimes seems like forever) and now there is no one to share my experiences of laughter, tears, joy, sorrow, optimism, pessimism, or anything else. I have a great void in my life right now. Try to keep me from feeling lonely—continue to be a presence in my life even though you may have been closer to my loved one than you were to me.

On the outside I may seem to be coping well, but on the inside I'm hurting terribly. I may appear to be strong, but inside I'm fragile. Tears may not come easily to me, but inside I'm crying oceans.

Don't do nothing, thinking it might not be the exact right thing. Anything is better than nothing. Any suggestion you make will let me know you care .