



Veterinary Grief Support: What NOT to Say, What NOT to Do

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Most of our knowledge about the “best” ways to deal with loss are based on myths and misguided information passed down from one generation to the next. And most of this information is just plain wrong! The following tips are based on years of clinical research and our experience with griever and represent the interventions that have not been found to be helpful.

- Do **not** use clichés such as “time will heal” or “everything happens for a reason.” Clichés are simplistic solutions to complex problems, and using them tends to make people suppress, rather than express, their feelings of grief.
- Do **not** compare one griever’s loss to another’s. Comparisons are attempts to minimize the impact of a loss and imply that the loss wasn’t as bad as it could have been. Comparing one loss to another tends to make people suppress, rather than express, their feelings of grief.
- Do **not** encourage griever to stay busy and to keep their minds off their grief. Grievers need slow, empty, alone time to fully experience their grief and move through it.
- Do **not** encourage griever to make major changes in their lives. After a significant loss, many griever consider moving, divorcing, or quitting their jobs. In general, though grief clouds a person’s judgement. Decisions made too soon after a loss may be regretted later.
- Do **not** attempt to cheer up griever. Encouraging griever to take vacations, go shopping, or medicate their pain with alcohol or tranquilizing drugs encourages them to avoid reality. Avoiding the immediate symptoms of grief can ultimately lead to complicated, unresolved, and even pathological grief outcomes.
- Do **not** scold or give advice, lectures, or pep talks to griever who are feeling down. Grief is a process that can take weeks, months, and even years to complete. Grievers need patience and understanding from their friends and family members, no matter how long their feelings seem to linger.
- Do **not** suggest griever replace the one they’ve lost. People who have experienced a loss are often urged to get on with life by remarrying, having another child, or adopting a new pet as soon as possible. Most griever view this advice as insensitive and are deeply offended by the implication that anyone else could take the place of the unique and special loved one who died.



For more information, visit the Veterinary Wisdom® Resource Center at www.veterinarywisdom.com

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