



Divorce: Helping Others Through the Stress of Loss by award-winning author and stress-relief expert Susie Mantell

Q: Dear Susie, My friend is in the process or divorcing, negotiating custody, settlement, etc., and is extremely stressed. While we've been friends for years, she seems distant and I'm not sure how to be the supportive friend I want to be. How can I know what she needs, and when to back off?

A: It's a natural urge to want to comfort those we love and to somehow make it better but there's no way around it. Divorce is Stressful.

Consider: Who is This Really About?

In some instances we really can provide comfort. It makes us feel better when we can help, but grief is a deeply personal place and ultimately, healing after divorce is an inside job. It looks different for each person. One wants nothing more than to be held and cry it out, while another might wish to share "war stories" for hours on-end. Some might prefer to grieve privately. They may put up emotional walls to be able to do so. Still another person may need to distance from the whole matter for a while until ready to approach the intense feelings involved. Some will go for a run while others take to their beds. Others get lost in their work, or watch sad movies that help them to access tears, or write their feelings in journals. Whether grief following a death, or the end of a marriage, the bereavement process will follow some common stages, but look different on each person. This will take some time. The important thing is to follow the lead of the bereaved.

Consider: What Do They Need?

Your friend's timetable may not be yours. The best we can offer anyone we care for as they go through a difficult time, is to recognize and respect their needs and be careful not to *impose* our own desire to help.

- In some cases, we can come right out and ask, "*How can I help? I want to give you what you need, but I am not sure what that is.*" Some people can't ask that question, and some cannot answer it. So listen to what they are *not* saying. If they go off to be alone, let them. Then gently welcome them back with a warm smile when they're ready for company. They are showing you what they need.

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- If they seem to be isolating in depression, extend an invitation to a light movie, a sporting event or a concert. That kind of outing doesn't require as much interaction as, say, lunch.
- If it feels right, you might also offer to baby-sit so they can get out on their own, or offer to bring over dinner and a board game.
- Think of creative ways to comfort. Offer to help paint a room, or something else you think they might enjoy. After my sister passed away, one of my own friends sent me a gift certificate for a massage.
- Try to avoid giving unsolicited advice. Be ready and willing to listen without judgment, and to listen some more. When in doubt, just be a good friend and follow his/her cues.
- Whether we are five or ninety-five, each loss we experience is different, and each brings back all the other losses we have known. In most case, the human spirit knows what to do and eventually life goes on, embracing the fond memories we choose to keep, releasing the pain, and opening to embrace the next chapter of life.

When to Seek Professional Help

Pretty much anyone experiencing separation or divorce could benefit from some skillful, compassionate counseling, and even more so if there are children involved. But if a person seems deeply depressed over time, or appears completely detached from the loss, or is behaving in ways that genuinely concern you, consult a mental health professional, physician or clergy member immediately. They can help ascertain if there is a need for professional help to get through this time.

(See other tips of depression on my website at www.relaxintuit.com)

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