

## Grief Support Regrets: You Don't Know 'til You Know

The following is a subset of responses to a survey done by *What's Your Grief* that asked:

### *What Do You Regret About Supporting a Loved One in Grief?*

1. I should have checked in more regularly and months later. It doesn't get better in a couple of weeks or months.
2. Never mentioning their loved one out of concern that it would 'upset' or 'remind' them.
3. Believing that saying nothing was better than saying the wrong thing.
4. Only reaching out on social media instead of sending a physical card.
5. I didn't send a card or a gift because I felt like we weren't close enough and they might find it strange that I sent something.
6. Thinking (and saying) that time will heal.
7. Telling them I understood when I had no idea.
8. I thought that there is a timeframe to grief and that because they outwardly seemed better that meant they were no longer grieving.
9. Not attending a funeral because we weren't that close. Now I know how much it means when people attend.
10. Distancing myself and not checking in or inviting them to things because I assumed they needed space. I should have asked what they needed.
11. Showing up when I wasn't wanted or needed because I wanted to feel useful.
12. I assumed what would be helpful for me was going to help them in their grief.
13. Calling someone "strong" and praising them for being "strong". Now I know that creates a pressure and makes people feel like they can't show their pain.
14. I regret the judgement I subconsciously had when people were still posting about their loved one months or years later. I didn't understand that grief is so ongoing.
15. Using platitudes like "at least they're no longer suffering or anything I said with "at least"
16. Not remembering the death anniversary date or other important dates.
17. Not thinking to check in at the holidays.
18. We didn't invite someone to a party, assuming they wouldn't want to come. We should have just asked.

19. I wish I'd reached out on National Siblings Day to friends who lost siblings.
20. Not reaching out on hard days - I wish I'd reached out on Mother's Day and Father's Day to friends who had lost a parent or a child.
21. I used toxic positivity, encouraging people to look for the silver lining and stay positive, rather than just letting them be with their feelings.
22. Trying to connect with someone by talking about my grief instead of listening to them.
23. I shouldn't have used religion to try to ease their pain when I didn't know what they believed.
24. I told someone that once they get through the funeral, the hardest part will be over.
25. On several occasions I encouraged friends grieving to stay busy, which I now see was just me telling them to avoid their grief.
26. Being afraid to ask them questions about the person who died, like their favorite memory.
27. I talked more than I listened.
28. I met an elderly woman at church and during our conversation she shared a tattered, 50+ year old picture of her baby that died. She was tearful sharing her story. I didn't understand why she "still felt sad". I had a baby five years later who died at 15 weeks. And then I completely understood that carrying around a picture of my dead child is absolutely normal.
29. Telling friends that the person who died "wouldn't want them to be sad" or would "want them to be happy again". I didn't realize until I lost someone how presumptuous and unhelpful that comment is.
30. Instead of saying "how are you?" (when of course the answer is 'terrible') I wish I had said, 'how are you grieving' or 'how are you coping' or something that better acknowledged the reality of grief.
31. I judged a friend who was taking photos at the funeral for her father. Now I understand that nothing is right or wrong. Honestly, the funeral for my son was such a blur - I kind of wish now that I had pictures.
32. For years I just sent flowers or donated - I never wrote a personal sympathy card. Now I always do.
33. I thought what mattered was saying the right thing, when really what mattered was showing up.
34. I assumed that faith in God was more comforting in grief than it actually is. The person is still gone from your life and faith doesn't change that pain.
35. Not taking their grief seriously after months had passed.
36. Trying to always make my friend feel better when she just wanted me to sit with her pain.
37. I said "things will go back to normal".
38. I didn't bring a meal because of a stupid logistical issue.
39. Using cliches like "God's timing" and "everything happens for a reason".

40. I asked a friend whose son died of an overdose what she wanted me to tell people about how he died, as though she should be embarrassed or should lie about the cause of death. I hate thinking of the fact that I did that.
41. Drinking with my friend at her father's funeral. I should have been clearheaded for her.
42. I judged so harshly my friend's hair. Now I'm CONVICTED that 'grief hair' is A THING.

Haley, Eleanor, MS, Williams, Litsa, MA, LCSW-C. *What's Your Grief? Lists to Help You Through Any Loss*, 2022, Quirk Books.