The Girlfriends' Guide to What to Expect When Your Girlfriend's Grieving

by Ginny Sparrow

hen I was 27 I lost my mother by suicide. Single, living alone with my pooch, my friends became my family, my rock, my shoulder. They were the source of comfort, the source of understanding.

And, the bane of my existence.

In all fairness, it's hard to do things right when a friend is grieving, and easy as pie to do things wrong. Some classically wrong things were: ignoring me, gossiping about me, trying to take my pain away by telling me my guilty feelings were foolish, among others things.

But, truthfully, it was the small things that really hurt.

A friend of mine had just gotten engaged when my mother died. I know she was excited about the upcoming wedding, but she repeatedly bugged me to rsvp about the out-of-town wedding. How could she be so inconsiderate? I chose to ignore her. I mean, how could I make travel decisions? I was lucky to rise from bed.

One friend called to give me her condolences on a Saturday afternoon – and then cut off the conversation to take another call.

Not everybody was inconsiderate. Other friends left cards on my door, or covered for me at work when I was slack, late, or crying in the bathroom. Others called from around the world as soon as they heard. ("Of course I'm up! What's sleep?") To this day I admire their effort and bravery to reach out to me as soon as possible.

Some of the most helpful people weren't close friends at all, but acquaintances who had some experience with grief. They knew not to give advice or say, "I know how you feel." They also knew to say something, for God's sake.

One acquaintance approached me at

a basketball game and said, "I heard about your mother, and I couldn't decide if it was crueler to not say anything, or say 'I'm sorry.' So I'm going to say, 'I'm sorry.'" I'll never forget those words; what an original, thoughtful, sincere thing to say! I think I fell in love with that guy at that moment.

Sometimes it's easier to say things like that to acquaintances. My friends knew my mother, and were survivors of her suicide as well. Perhaps they were too close to the matter to be helpful.

I now work at a counseling center. Daily, friends of grieving families ask me what they can say to – and do for – their friends. I often give the following tips:

 Listen and be with your friend with sincerity. You don't need to say much, but show concern with your body language and your expressions. Match their presence. If they are sitting formally in the chair and (See GUIDE, p. 4)

SPRC Launches Web-Site

In October, the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) launched its web-site at www.sprc.org. The web-site is "a one-stop source for many important publications and provides an interactive on-line calendar of national and local suicide prevention events," according to SPRC.

"Visitors to www.sprc.org will be able to connect with suicide prevention specialists assigned to their state or territory, post information about suicide prevention events, and register for SPRC regional conferences. The site features easy access to key documents including the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention, the Institute of Medicine Report, and the report of the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health."

The SPRC is "the nation's first federally-funded suicide prevention resource center. . . . The Center provides technical assistance, training. and resource materials to strengthen suicide prevention networks throughout the country and advance the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention. The Center is supported by a grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and is based at Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), in Newton, MA. SPRC is a highly collaborative effort between EDC and its partners - the American Association of Suicidology, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. the Suicide Prevention Action Network, the Critical Illness and Trauma Foundation, National Alliance for the Mentally III, National Hopeline, National Mental Health Association, National Organization of People of Color Against Suicide, National Resource Center for Suicide Prevention and Aftercare, and the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation."

Girlfriends Guide To What To Expect

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