

TEN THINGS I HAVE LEARNED

WALKING WITH PEOPLE THROUGH DEATH AND GRIEF

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1

Death is scary because it is the great unknown, the firmest of all existential limits. While many of us hold religious beliefs about what “comes next,” no one truly knows, and this can cause anxiety.

2

It is not uncommon for the dying person to act as a comforter to their loved ones. This can add an extra burden to the person who is already burdened by pain, illness, and the heavy psychic load of approaching death.

3

The impending death of a loved one can bring up emotions of every variety, often many at once that are difficult to sort through. Allowing yourself to feel emotions without judgment will help you remain fully present.

4

Death is always sudden, even when it is expected. Some dying people need permission from their loved ones to let go. Many will wait until their loved ones have left the room to release their final breaths. This is their final kindness.

5

Most people have difficulty talking about death. They use euphemisms like “passed,” “passed on,” or “passed away,” rather than the more precise word “died.” While the use of the euphemism is understandable as a way to distance from the pain of death, confronting the reality of what has happened by using the word “died” can also be helpful.

6

Showing up for the funeral of someone you care about is important. Many people regret missing funerals that they could have attended.

7

Grief manifests in many different ways, even for people in the same family grieving the death of the same person. These different manifestations happen because of varying life experiences, relationship with the deceased, emotional and psychological state, etc. One of the best ways to show love to others in a time of grief is to make room for expressions of grief that differ from your own.

8

The best way to comfort a grieving person is through the language of embrace. If you need to say something, say "I love you," rather than a platitude like "They're in a better place" or "It was part of God's plan."

9

Do not ask a grieving person if there's anything you can do for them. While well-intentioned, this adds to the load of decisions that is probably already overwhelming them. If you need to do something, just do it. Bring over the casserole. The worst that can happen is that they don't eat it. And they will know you were thinking about them.

10

Grief does not end. It simply transforms into new expressions. In many cases, there comes a day when you don't think about the deceased at all, and that causes a whole new form of grief to crash over you. The good news is that grief is love transformed by loss, so even though grief is painful, it is still a form of love.