

What to Say When You Don't Know What to Say

Quick Reference Card

When Someone Is Grieving

Your presence matters more than your words. Simple, grounded language helps the nervous system feel safer.

Helpful Things to Say

- “I’m so sorry this happened.”
- “I don’t have the right words, but I care about you.”
 - “I’m here with you.”
- “Would you like company or quiet right now?”

Why This Helps

These phrases reduce pressure, validate loss, and help the brain exit fight-or-flight by offering safety and choice.

Phrases to Avoid

- “Everything happens for a reason.”
 - “They’re in a better place.”
 - “At least you still have...”
 - “Be strong.”

Why to Avoid Them

Meaning-making too early can increase distress and make the person feel unseen or silenced.

If You Said the Wrong Thing

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt you. I’m still here.”
Repair matters more than perfection.