

COMPANIONS

ACTIVE LISTENING

One of the most important things someone can do for a person in grief is to listen, because we need to tell our story over and over again.

The head knows what's happened but it takes a long time for the heart to catch up, and telling the story is the way that is accomplished.

INTENSITY OF EMOTIONS

There are many emotions in grief, and the intensity of those emotions can be frightening. That's why people want to avoid grieving; it's hard work. Some of the hardest feelings are just plain sadness and feeling helpless.

We replay our loss again and again, trying to figure out whether we could have done something different. We always end up at the same point; there was nothing we could do.

IDENTIFY YOUR FEELINGS

You need to say what you're feeling—and keep talking about it. Listeners can help us by giving us a safe place to talk about our loss and all the feelings that are part of it.

The process is different for everyone, but the initial period of grief often includes shock, numbness, and even feeling disconnected from our body and can be frightening.

"I feel helpless."

"I feel sad."

"I feel angry."

People are often worried about what to say, and not knowing what to say is what keeps them away from us. "I don't know what to say. I might say the wrong thing."

But really, you need to say very little. Active listening is what will help me heal most.

Griefs that haven't been expressed never go away. They don't just disappear.

You have to grieve, you have to get it out. And if you don't, it's going to hurt you. It's going to hurt those around you, and it's going to affect you physically.

It's so important to get grief out. That's why we need people to listen to us.

Further along, you might obsess for your loved one, have dreams about him or her, think you saw or even heard them speak. These thoughts can make us feel crazy at times. It's frightening if you don't know that this is normal.

In another phase of the grief journey we often feel disorganized, physically depressed, and feel as though we're physically falling apart.

Eventually, things begin to normalize. We start to eat and sleep normally, and life starts to fit into a normal pattern that feels good enough to live with.

After the initial shock of grief wears off, you feel like other people don't want you around when you're feeling sad. Nobody likes to be sad, and nobody likes to be around sad people, so we hide.

It's hard going back to work, back to church, back to the office, back into a routine. If there's any one wonderful thing that a person can do to help a griever, it's to say "Come with me. I'll sit with you in

church," or "Let's go together to the office today," or something like that.

You need someone to take your hand and help you back into your normal life—a companion along the way.

Adapted from an interview transcript with the Reverend Corrine Chilstrom, Associate Pastor at St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Park Ridge, IL., conducted by Richard A. Jensen, Director/Speaker of LUTHERAN VESPER, a radio ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, based upon Pastor Chilstrom's book: "Andrew, You Died Too Soon."