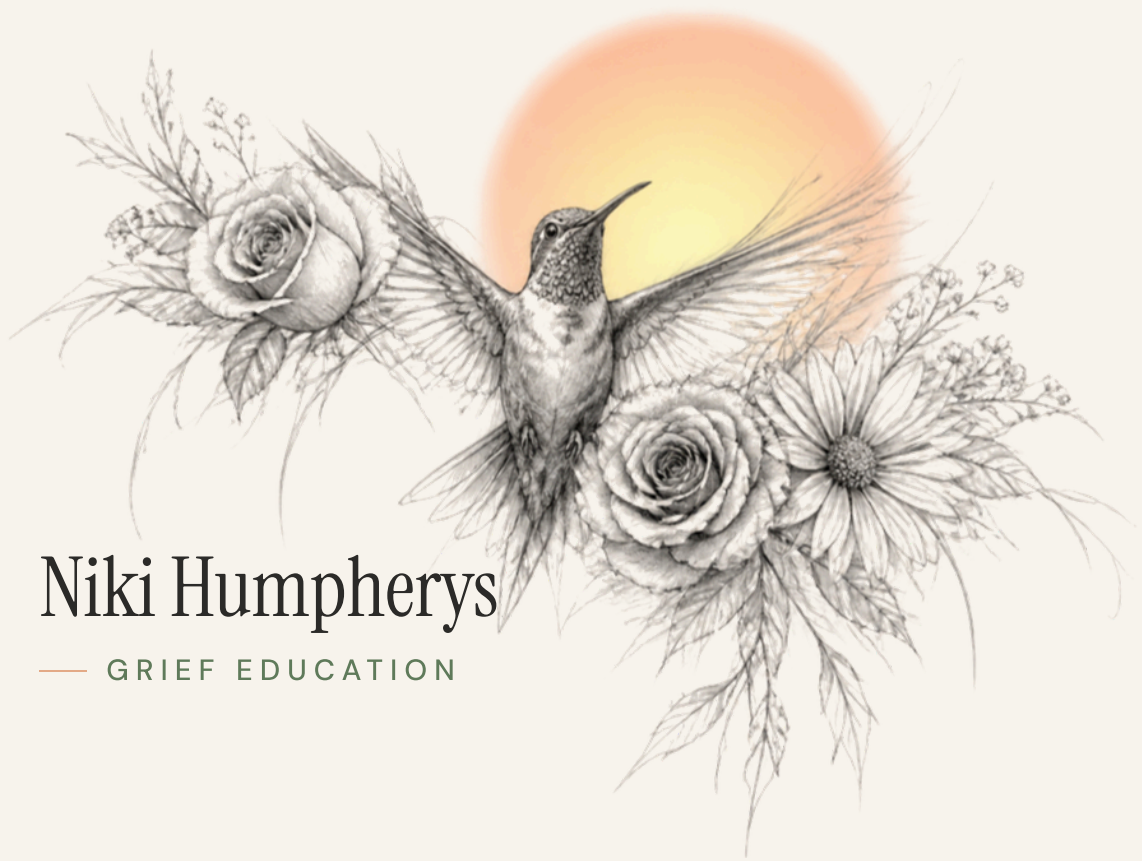




Niki Humpherys

— GRIEF EDUCATION

Help! What do I *say to them?*

Words that help, words to skip and texts you can send

Real tears. Real love.



A FREE GUIDE FOR FRIENDS & FAMILY

Help! What do I *say to them?*

Words that help, words to skip and texts you can send today

I'm learning this for _____

Someone you love is grieving. You want to help, but you're afraid of saying the wrong thing. Most of us were never taught what to say. This short guide gives you simple, honest words, so you can stop worrying about being perfect and start showing up.



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Short and true *is enough*

Almost all of us have said the wrong thing to someone grieving. We weren't trying to hurt them. We were trying to help. The words that land best are short and honest. They don't explain the loss or make it smaller. They say: I see it. I'm not going anywhere.

Words *that help*

- "I'm so sorry. I'm here for you."
- "I don't know what to say. I love you."
- "I've been thinking about you and [name]."
- "I'm here, today and in the months ahead."
- "You don't have to answer this. I'm here."
- "Tell me about [name]. I'd love to hear."
- "I miss [name] too." (if you knew them)
- "Of course you feel that way."
- "How is today?" (smaller than "how are you?")
- "You don't have to be okay with me."
- "I'm bringing dinner Thursday. Cooler on the porch."
- "Can I sit with you for a while?"

Or say it *without words*

- A hug or a hand on their shoulder, if that's welcome
- Sitting with them in the quiet. You don't have to fill it.
- Saying their person's name, on ordinary days too
- Showing up again next month, when the cards stop coming

The words I'll *use first*

Kind people say these. *There's a gentler way.*

Most words that sting come from love. They look for a bright side, explain why it happened or hurry the hurt along. A quick rule: if it starts with "at least" or explains why, let it go.

Skip "At least..." (they lived a long life, it was quick). **Try:** "This is so hard."

Skip "Everything happens for a reason." It asks them to find a purpose in their loss. **Try:** "I don't understand it either."

Skip "They're in a better place." Unless it's their own belief, in their own words. **Try:** "I wish they were here."

Skip "I know how you feel." Even if you've lost someone too, their loss is their own. **Try:** "What is it like for you?"

Skip "Let me know if you need anything." It hands them a job. **Try:** "I'm dropping off groceries Saturday. Any no's?"

Skip "Be strong." Strong for who? It asks them to look okay for everyone else. **Try:** "You don't have to be strong with me."

Skip "Time heals." Grief doesn't follow a clock. **Try:** "I'll still be here in a year."

Skip blaming, even gently. ("If only they had...") It adds shame to grief. **Try:** "Nothing about this is your fault or theirs to carry alone."

Skip "How did it happen?" It's their story to tell, if and when they want to. **Try:** Let them lead.

Skip "You should be doing better by now." There is no timeline. **Try:** "How are you really doing these days?"

Skip changing the subject when they cry. Tears aren't a problem to fix. **Try:** Stay. Hand them a tissue. Wait.

Skip saying nothing at all. Silence can feel like their person has been forgotten. **Try:** Clumsy and kind beats quiet.

WHAT I USUALLY SAY

WHAT I'LL SAY INSTEAD

Copy one. *Press send.*

A text lets them answer when they're ready, or not at all. You don't need a reply to know it mattered. Keep it short. Use their person's name. Keep sending, especially after the first few weeks, when most people go quiet.

- **The first week:** "I love you. No need to answer. I'm here."
- **A few weeks later:** "Thinking of you and [name] today. Still here."
- **A memory:** "I was just remembering when [name]... Wanted you to know."
- **An offer:** "I'm at the store. Text me 3 things you need."
- **Their birthday:** "Happy birthday to [name]. I'm remembering them with you."
- **The anniversary:** "A year ago today. I haven't forgotten [name]. I love you."
- **Holidays:** "I know [name]'s chair is empty. Thinking of you all."
- **No reply yet:** "No pressure. I'll keep checking in."

If you already said *the wrong thing*

You're human. What matters most is that you don't disappear out of embarrassment.

1. **Name it:** "I keep thinking about what I said."
2. **Own it:** "I'm sorry. That's not what I meant."
3. **Come back:** "I love you. I'm still here." Then keep showing up.

Who I'll text *and when*

You don't need perfect words. You need to show up.

Want more? **How to Show Up for a Grieving Family** is my full guide: practical help, the hard dates, brothers and sisters, social media and work. HarpersHopeStore.com

With credit: These pages draw on grief expert David Kessler's guidance on what to say and what to skip (grief.com, "10 Best & Worst Things to Say to Someone in Grief"), retold in my own words, plus research on continuing bonds (Klass, Silverman & Nickman). No endorsement or partnership is implied. Niki Humpherys is a certified grief educator and coach, not a licensed therapist. If you or someone you love is in crisis, call or text 988 (U.S.) or your local emergency number.



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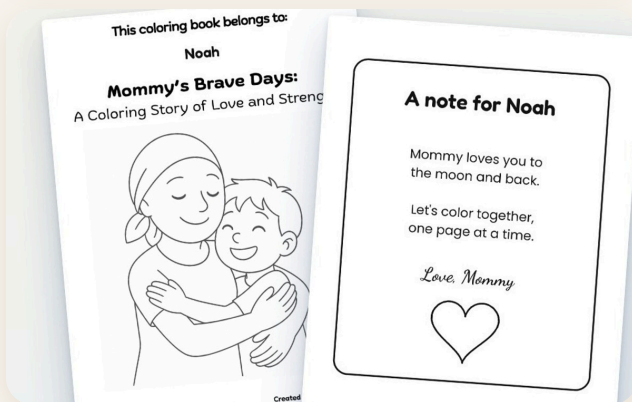
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Written the way I wish someone had spoken to me: gently, honestly and without a timeline. For moms, dads, siblings, little ones and the holidays.

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