

How you can help those widowed young

– things I'd like you to know

Do	Don't
Do talk to me – even if you don't know what to say. Knowing you are sorry is a good start.	Don't avoid me – it hurts so much when you cross the road when you see me coming rather than be willing to face me.
Do keep in touch; keep phoning especially as weeks turn into months and years. Be available.	Don't phone and just say <i>"let me know if I can help"</i> and leave it at that.
Do talk about my partner. I love to hear your memories of him/her.	Don't worry about feeling 'awkward' – be normal, yourself, my friend – I am still the same person.
Do think carefully before you speak – I'm feeling vulnerable at the moment and insensitivity could pull me down very low.	Don't come out with platitudes, trite answers or comments. Right now, all I want is to have him/her back.
Do listen – it can be more important than what you say. Sometimes I need to know that I am heard.	Don't say things like – <i>"You can always marry again, you're still young"</i> .
Do give practical support. I'm not able to cope with routines at the moment so providing meals, or help at home and with my children is vital.	Don't wait to be asked for help – initially there is so much help I need with just about everything.
Do offer specific help – <i>"I'll pick the children up on Friday, take them out, give them tea and bring them back at 6."</i>	Don't overload me with responsibilities – for a while it will be all I can cope with to get out of bed and get dressed.
Do still talk about every day things <i>that matter</i> as well. I'm still interested in you and what is going on around me, but 'small talk' can seem very trivial.	If you have a faith, don't be super-spiritual and feel you have to defend God's case.
Do understand that it will take time for me even to begin to adjust to life as is has to be for me from now on.	Don't feel you have to do something - just be there.
Do give me space to be as I am, tears and all. Don't try to discourage my tears and please be willing to cry with me too.	Don't ignore the loss, or avoid asking questions about the person who has died.
Do be sensitive and aware e.g. Christmas cards – a mention of my partner will let me know that you miss him/her at this time too.	Don't expect me to be over it – I will never get over it, but I may find a 'new normal' in time.
Do remember my children! They can sometimes be neglected as they may not be so willing to talk.	Don't say <i>"be strong"</i> – it means <i>"don't share your pain, keep it to yourself"</i> .
Do invite me out to coffee or lunch – just to change the scene for a while.	Don't avoid the issue publicly – in schools, churches etc.

Do make allowances for my children's behaviour. It may be very disruptive and difficult. They need lots of patience and love.	Don't forget to give time and attention to my children – I may be struggling with my feelings towards them.
Do still invite me to events and parties, but understand if sometimes I feel unable to go or have to leave early.	Don't tell me that you've been too busy to phone or get in touch. Better to say <i>"I didn't know what to say."</i>
Do remember that appearances can be deceptive – I may look as if I'm coping okay, but inside I may be falling apart.	Don't ask me how I am if you only want to hear <i>"I'm okay thank you."</i> Be prepared for the truth.
Do remember that there is no time limit on grief – it will go on long after others expect. Please walk that road with me.	If you have a faith, don't just say <i>"I'm praying for you"</i> . Be prepared to be part of the answer by getting involved.
Do find ways to remember the anniversaries that the family will appreciate – be creative, I appreciate others' ideas.	Don't be afraid to show your emotions, cry with me, and tell me how you feel.
Do be ready to listen to all the jumble of emotions I may be feeling without trying to give answers or being judgemental.	Don't judge me for my behaviour, words, actions or attitudes – they will find a proper level in time.
Do be aware that my children may react in ways that seem out of character – they have gone through the worst experience imaginable and may be very frightened and insecure.	Don't try and give me answers – it is unlikely that you will have any that will satisfy me – just allow me to express all my fears, questions and doubts.
Do show sensitivity – ring first – don't just show up at the door. Although sometimes it may be just the break I need – be prepared for me to say that I can't cope with company just now.	Don't measure the way I react and the emotions I express by your own expectations or experience. My grief is unique to me.
Do be aware that there will be times when I don't feel able to talk – but this doesn't mean I won't want to talk at another time.	Don't say that you understand how I feel – whatever your loss it will be different to mine as each grief is individual.
Do let me know that you share my sense of loss and that you miss my partner too. This can take away isolation and be a great support.	Don't think that <i>"he/she has still got many years of life ahead of him/her"</i> . The life I was living and planning for is over. I just need to adjust to that first before thinking about the future.
Do encourage me to be kind to myself and not to push myself to meet other people's expectations of how I should be.	Don't try to find something positive in my partner's death.
Do help with planning and suggestions for the funeral – you could spend months thinking of a wedding and just a few days for a funeral. The details are very important.	Don't think that death puts a ban on laughter. Remembering and enjoying the good times we had together is important and helps me to heal.