



## *Changes in Social Circles Following a Death*

People are often puzzled by the support or lack of support they get from others following a death. “I thought she would be there for me but she hasn’t reached out once,” or, “I hardly know him but he has been there for me at times when I was overwhelmed and needed a shoulder to lean on.”

Death teaches us so many things. It teaches us how precious life is, how the little things don’t matter, and that meaning comes out of our relationships not out of our career success or social status. It teaches us what to say, or not say, when we attend wakes and funerals. It teaches us that grief is not resolved or even felt in the short period of Bereavement Leave granted by most workplaces. It teaches us that grief is a process which each person goes through in his or her own way and in his or her own time. It teaches us that it can really hurt when someone says, “It was for the best,” or, “He is in a better place,” and other such sayings, which are often said by well-meaning people who may not know how to truly lend support.

If you find you are not getting the support from others that you expected, please realize that it is not out of unkindness or lack of caring that they are not reaching out to you. It may simply be a lack of experience with loss. Our society does not “do” grief. Most people are uncomfortable in the face of grief and have no idea what to say or do to be supportive.

Ironically, you are put in the position of telling others what you need and what can help. Don’t hesitate to make a list of things that may help you, such as, “I could use help with meals because there is so much to do right now and I am so exhausted,” “It would help if you could give me the name of someone reliable to mow my lawn and plow my driveway,” “It would be such a help if you could watch my children for a few hours so I could have some time to myself.” You may have to say that it would help to just be able to talk about the person who died and remember him or her and all you went through together. Sometimes you have to be the one to introduce “the elephant in the room,” because others are under the mistaken impression that talking about the person who died will make your pain worse. You will have to tell people that it is hard to make decisions and that you might change your mind at the last minute, that you need to be with people but you also need alone time, that grief triggers come out of the blue with songs on the radio and places that remind you of your loved one, and that the tears will come, then the tears will stop, and you just need their presence through the tough moments.

Your friendships may well shift in the months and years following the death. Old friendships may fade and new ones may develop. Embrace those who can be there for you, educate those you want to be there for you, and accept the fact that your needs and values have changed because of the death.