

When Their World Stops

SECOND EDITION

The Essential Guide to TRULY
Helping Anyone in Grief

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An Important Note from the Author

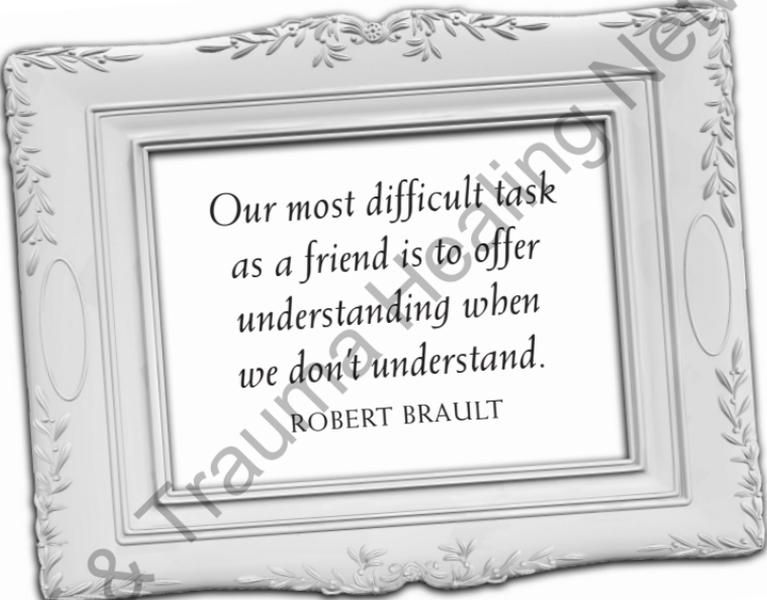


PEOPLE GRIEVE DIFFERENTLY

WHAT I'M SHARING WITH YOU HERE ARE FEELINGS AND NEEDS that are very common in grief. However, each person's grief experience and journey are unique. So it's possible that a given person will not respond the way you might think. If this happens, rest assured that you have enough in this guide to help in some way. Just let the grieving person's responses guide you.

— Anne-Marie Lockmyer

P.S. I use the terms *they/them/their* throughout this book to easily cover both genders, knowing full well that, from a technical standpoint, this is grammatically incorrect. We all end up using *they/them/their* when we talk about people in the singular context, though. So to keep things both simple and conversational, I do the same thing here.

A decorative, ornate frame with intricate floral and leaf patterns. The frame is rectangular with rounded corners and a double-line border. Inside the frame, the text is centered and reads: "Our most difficult task as a friend is to offer understanding when we don't understand." Below the quote, the name "ROBERT BRAULT" is written in a smaller, all-caps font.

*Our most difficult task
as a friend is to offer
understanding when
we don't understand.*

ROBERT BRAULT

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The Back Story



IT'S 4:30 IN THE MORNING AS THE SHUTTLE VAN STOPS IN FRONT of my house to drive me to LAX. I'm heading off for a fun work trip to the Caribbean for a week.

My husband Mark and I kiss, have a big hug, and tell each other "I love you."

That memory is now forever ingrained in my mind: Standing in the driveway in the dark with my best friend, the love of my life.

For this would be our last kiss.



I've spent just one day at Club Med, and I'm having a great time with my coworkers. As I dress for dinner in my hotel room, the phone rings. My roommate answers and says, "It's for you."

I grab the phone and say, "Hello?"

“Anne-Marie, this is Julia,” I hear on the other end. My heart sinks immediately. Julia is my husband’s cousin, and if she’s calling, it’s something bad.

She tells me to sit down, which of course I don’t.

“Just tell me, Julia! Tell me what’s happened!”

“Anne-Marie, Mark died!”

“No! No! No! This can’t be real!” I think to myself.
“This can’t be real! No!”

*

It was four days before our twenty-sixth wedding anniversary. Mark had suffered a brain aneurysm and had died in our bedroom. Our adult son had found him.

The world as I knew it stopped at that moment. It would NEVER be the same! I would NEVER be the same! The depth of the pain is unimaginable. The sounds that came out of me as I cried were like nothing I’d ever heard before.

Half of me was gone.

*

As I traveled the journey of grief over the next year, I saw how uncomfortable and awkward people were with me. They didn’t know what to do. Some avoided me. It’s true that, after the memorial service, pretty much everyone leaves; they move on. But I didn’t.

I thus became very aware of the thoughtful and kind things people did. I also became aware of the thoughtless

and hurtful things people did — without realizing it, of course. As a matter of fact, I had to apologize to friends of mine who had lost loved ones in the past, as I figured out that I had been one of the thoughtless ones in their lives during their time of pain. **Until you've experienced something like this, you just don't know.**

I kept noticing that most people have no clue how to talk to or support someone who is grieving. So someone, I thought, should write a book to guide people so that the grief of a person they care about no longer has to be awkward or something to be feared.

“Someone” turned out to be me.

Before Mark died, I would have needed a book like this one. My purpose in writing it is to encourage you and equip you to support the grieving person in your life. I want to help you understand what they are experiencing so that you can meet their needs — without having to guess about it all. Because I know firsthand that it's too easy to guess incorrectly.

If reading this book helps you comfort your grieving friend in any way you would not have been able to before, then I will consider it a success.



I had always considered myself a great friend — encouraging, there to help when needed, sensitive, able to see when people were suffering and how I might comfort them. But when my husband died so suddenly, I soon came to realize

that, when it came to helping someone who was grieving ... I KNEW VERY, VERY LITTLE!

As I began my own journey of grief, I became painfully aware that in the past I had not met the needs of my grieving friends as well as I'd believed. I thought I had known what to say and do, but I didn't. I thought I had understood how long their grieving should go on, but I didn't. I thought I had known what they should do, but I didn't.

Then there were the things I knew I hadn't known: what to say, what to ask. Should I talk about the grieving person's loved one or not? Should I mention the good things going on in my life? Should I mention a relationship I have that the grieving person has lost? Is it okay to watch a movie with them that could remind them of their loss? Should I invite them to a celebratory event like a birthday party or a wedding, as it could also remind them of their loss? Should I just avoid them so that I don't say anything wrong?

Talk about walking on eggshells.

When I joined a grief group, the first thing I learned was not to expect much from my friends so that I wouldn't be disappointed. And it was true. It's not that friends don't care or don't want to help. They just have no idea what to do or say. I was one of those friends myself. We are able to support our friends through many hard times, but when it comes to the death of a loved one it's like we get tongue-tied and paralyzed. We are fearful, desperately wanting to help but feeling inadequate to do so. Grief makes us

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uncomfortable, and we are at a loss as to what to do. Often we blurt out something we shouldn't. Or, sometimes, we simply do nothing.

I hope that what I've learned through my grief experience will help you be the friend you want to be to the grieving person in your life — the one you're trying to help right now. When we're not there for those who are grieving, it's not because we don't care; we do. **We just aren't sure how to respond. And we're scared.**

But we can do it. YOU can do it! And with a little knowledge and willingness, you will. Because you already have the most important quality you need to be helpful ...

You care.