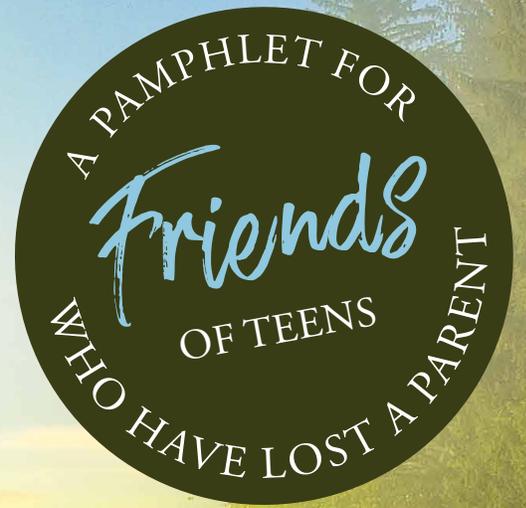


THE SCHERER FAMILY EDITION

I WISH  
*Someone*  
WOULD  
HAVE  
TOLD ME



MIRIAM RIBIAT



Dear Friend,

A few months ago, a Links member asked if we had a booklet, or even an article, she could share with her friends that would explain what she was going through after losing a parent.

I was wondering what to do with this great idea when my colleague, Miriam Ribiat, mentioned she had just given a class for teens on how to talk to their grieving friend. Miriam recently published an incredible book for teens who lost a parent, *I Wish Someone Would Have Told Me*, and it's been so helpful, not just to teens but to adults too.

A lightbulb went off in my brain: Miriam was the perfect writer for this project!

After interviewing many teens who lost a parent, Miriam has gained tremendous insight into what they want from their friends, and I absolutely love the finished product.

Having said that, I'd like to say this as well: If you are a girl who lost a parent and after reading this, you think, "Nah, this is not what I would say," know that we want to hear from you for future editions. But more importantly—share those differences with your friends! If there is ONE message we hope to share, it's this: The more you communicate your needs and wants, the more your friendships will thrive.

This project was a joint endeavor between Chevrah Lomdei Mishnah and Links—a partnership I'm honored by and grateful for.

As with any Links project, Esti Bald was the final editorial eye, providing many important insights and offering fabulous suggestions.

I am so grateful to the team that pulled this together at record speed.

May this project bring more sensitivity, friendship, and kindness,

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# What You Should Know as a Friend to Someone Who Has Lost a Parent

**W**HEN SHULY FOUND OUT THAT HER father had received a frightening diagnosis, she ran to call her best friend Ayala. From that moment on, Ayala became her biggest support. Ayala listened to her when she talked about her fear of losing her father. She listened as Shuly spoke about how awful it was to see her father so weak. Ayala came over on Sundays to help with the younger children, and at times, Ayala would even come over just to clean up the toys or the kitchen counters.

When Shuly didn't show up to school one day, Ayala was nervous. She was sure something was very wrong. When she called Shuly after school, she couldn't get through. It was only a little later in the evening that she heard the news: Shuly's father had been niftar.

Ayala was so sad for her best friend. She wanted so badly to be there for her. After deliberating for a while whether she should call her or not, she picked up the phone. But Shuly didn't want to talk. Not that day nor the next one. When Ayala went to be menachem aveil, she felt like a stranger. Shuly barely looked at her and spoke to her even less.

Ayala felt bad. Wasn't this her best friend? Hadn't she been there for Shuly throughout her journey with her sick father? Why was she just ignoring her now?

Of course, Ayala felt bad. She felt rejected by her close friend. And that hurts. It is okay for her to admit that she was hurt. But she also needed to understand that Shuly was hurting even more. Her life had just changed so dramatically. She had been thrust into a whole new world.

So where do you, as a friend, fit in to this new world?

## Finding a New Balance

Your friend who just suffered a loss needs to be the leader in this case. She might need her space. But that doesn't mean she isn't interested in you as a friend anymore. As a good friend, you should give her the space she needs in a gracious way. Don't hint or make subtle comments. This might make her move further away. If you can get through this tough period, your friendship will often grow stronger and deeper.

At some point, it may be okay for you to have an honest conversation and let your friend know you're hurting since she doesn't let you in anymore. But such a conversation may need to wait at least a year. Say it gently and let her know you understand that she needs time to work through this stuff.

As Shuly shared: "I felt like I walked through a door, out of one world and into another. My friends were part of an old world. Could they really care about a grade or getting to a store to catch a good sale? Really? Didn't they know that people die? Didn't they know that my father was never coming back home? I just couldn't be part of their world."

But she also shared that she needed them so badly. At the same time, determining their role in her new life was so difficult. And daunting.

## There's No One Right Way

I wish I could give you a list of do's and don'ts.

Do say this, but don't say that. Do this, but don't do that. But when grieving, each person travels along a very different kind of journey. And what may be so



supportive and helpful for one girl can feel extremely hurtful or intrusive to another girl.

Part of your job is to try to support your friend the way she wants to be supported – not the way you think she should be supported. Sometimes it is hard to know what to do. So ask. And ask again.

“What do you need from me now? How can I show you my support? Should I sit with you? Should I just listen, or do you want my feedback? Can I offer you a hug?”

Your friend might not know. But knowing that she has the support of friends during this difficult time can be a huge step in helping her get through it.

## Constantly Changing Emotions

The spectrum of emotions during grief is very wide-ranging and can include sadness, depression, guilt, anger, anxiety, despair, hopelessness, and isolation. The crazy thing about it is that your friend can be so sad or angry one moment and a few minutes later, she can be ready for a spirited game of basketball or a fun trip to the roller-skating rink. This might feel confusing to you. Is she sad or is she fine?

Imagine this: Devora lost her mother a few months ago, which means she is unable to go shopping for new clothes. Last week when her friends were talking about where to shop for *yom-tov* clothes, Devora made a joke about shopping with her (dead) mother. She even offered to go along with her friends. The way she said it was so funny, everyone was doubled over in laughter.

But a week later, when Brocha told Devora that her mother promised her a shopping trip after helping out, Devora's eyes flashed with hurt. And she said, “How could you be so insensitive? You know I can never shop with my mother again, and for this *yom-tov* I can't even get new clothes!” This left Brocha feeling so confused. She replayed both conversations in her head, not understanding what went wrong.

The answer is that nothing went wrong. Devora is grieving – and what she was okay with last week was hurtful this week. Constantly changing emotions is a normal part of the grief process.

What can you do about it? Nothing. And don't feel guilty if a sudden down takes your friend over. It isn't you. It is the process of grieving. It is so hard to see your friend in pain. You can't fix it. You can just let her know that you are there for her.

## Back to School

Your very close friend just got up from *shivah*, and she is coming back to school tomorrow. What should you do? If you speak to her the night before she is coming back, you can ask her how you can support her. Does she want to meet you outside the building, and you will walk in together? Does she want to prepare something to say to break the ice? Does she want you to follow her around the hallway to scout out for any girls who might just stare?

Or does she just want to come back and pretend that nothing happened?

She might think she wants one thing but once in school she'll realize she wants something else. Follow her lead. What she wants is what you should do.

## Don't Be Afraid of Mistakes

Are you afraid of messing up? You probably will. But this is brand-new for everyone. You have to learn together. Remember not to get angry at yourself for messing up. Give yourself leeway. And of course, proper communication and asking your friend what *she* wants is most important.

## When You're Only a “Friendly”

What if you aren't a close friend, just a “friendly” or even just a classmate. What should you do? Well, you shouldn't stare. Don't look at her pityingly and don't go out of your way to be extra nice to her. Acknowledge that she was out for a week and then act regular.

That is what most girls want. If your friend says she wants something different, then do it for her. But most times girls just want to be treated normally.



## If She's Angry

One day, as Shuly and Ayala were volunteering for a *chessed* organization, Shuly turned to Ayala and said, “You know, I am really angry at Hashem. How could He take my father? After all the *Tehillim* that was said and all the extra things people did as a *zechus* for him, Hashem let him die. I am just so angry!”

Ayala panicked. She didn't know how to respond.

## Validate and Validate Again

Your friend is likely hoping for validation. Yes, it is that simple. Look at your friend and say, “I understand. It seems so unfair. It's so tough for you. I get it.”

When your friend sees you can listen without judgment, she will continue opening up to you because she feels safe. Being a safe friend is the best thing you can do right now for your hurting friend.

## Jealousy

When Aviva went to seminary, she was hit with the word “mother” wherever she went. She was jealous. She wished she still had her mother.

Yes, we all know that jealousy is wrong. We all know that the life we have is tailor-made for us. Yet when your friend tells you she is struggling with jealousy, that is not what she wants to hear. Again, what she needs is validation. “Of course you're jealous. Who wouldn't be? You want your mother. It isn't a crazy thing to want.”

## Don't push the emotion away. Validate it.

When we try to push away an emotion, the feeling doesn't leave—it just grows stronger and stronger. The first step in getting through an emotion is to validate and affirm that it's here and we aren't terrible people for feeling this way.

Hashem put jealousy into this world. We see it as far back as Kayin and Hevel. Jealousy is real. It's what you do with it that matters. By giving your friend the space to talk about what she's feeling, you're helping her deal with it.

## Guilt: It's Pretty Common

Most people feel guilty after a parent dies. When a friend turns to you and says, “I feel so guilty. I really wasn't a good daughter,” the response shouldn't be, “What, how can you say that? You were the best daughter ever!” She might need to hear that, but first see if you can hear her out. Ask her why she feels guilty; maybe she feels bad that she didn't visit her parent in the hospital, or for constantly bickering about her parent's rules, or that she didn't help out enough in the house while her parent was sick. Or get this: She might feel guilty that she isn't sad enough or that she is happy that *others are feeling guilty or sad*.

All these guilt feelings are normal. Validating them can be very helpful. Pointing out that a girl was being a regular girl can also help with certain aspects of guilt. Maybe she did argue a lot with her mother. But her mother probably appreciated having a normal daughter. Maybe she didn't visit enough in the hospital. But could it be it was for her own protection? Maybe she needed the denial to cope and going to the hospital stripped her of any denial.

Guilt is in this world for one purpose: to motivate us to evaluate if there are any areas in which we can improve. Wallowing in guilt is counterproductive. If there is a specific point that your friend talks about, you might be able to help her see how to incorporate relevant changes into her life today. This can help her see that her guilt motivated her to become a better person.

## Simchos Are Times of Emotion

A *simchah* is always an emotionally charged time. Sometimes, besides the emotions related to the actual *simchah*, there can be tension in the home from all the extra work involved. When a parent is *niftar*, there can be the additional feelings of sadness and even fear about how this can be pulled off without one parent.

Your friend might need you as a sounding board. Just listen. Don't tell her to be grateful because it is a *simchah*. Don't tell her how lucky she is that after this tragedy Hashem is showering her family with *berachah*. Just listen.



## Preparing for the *Simchah* Together

She might talk to you about the *simchah* itself. Or as it gets closer you can ask her about it: “What are you most afraid of at this *simchah*? How can I be there for you?”

Does she want you to come and stand next to her the whole time?

Does she want you to try to be available by phone, so if she needs you, she can call you?

Maybe she just needs someone with whom to talk out the whole *simchah* to help her mentally prepare herself.

For example: “Fraidy will walk into the *kabbalas panim*, and my mother won’t be there. Instead, my aunt will sit with her.” Let your friend cry as she talks it out if she needs to (and you can cry along with her).

Your friend might also want to be prepared for the insensitive comments people unfortunately make.

Nechama knew that a certain family friend would say exactly all the wrong things at her upcoming family *simchah*. So together with her friend, they came up with all the crazy things this woman might say and all the comebacks she wished she could reply. They were crying from laughter as they spouted all the hilarious comments and answers. But Nechama knew she was well-prepared for any silly comments people might make.

## Talking about the *Niftar*

Should you or shouldn’t you? What does your friend want? You might be getting mixed messages from her. One day she’ll share a story about her parent, but the next day when it comes up in conversation, she’ll be annoyed at you for bringing up something about that parent.

Again, you can ask her: “What is it that you would like from me? Are you okay if I tell you about a memory that I had? Should I only bring it up when you start the conversation?”

She might not know. You might have to play it by ear. Maybe you’ll bring it up when she isn’t in the mood and she’ll be annoyed at you. Hopefully you can trust that the relationship is strong enough not to let such a thing

get in the way of your friendship.

Don’t berate yourself for the decisions that you made about whether you should or shouldn’t say something. Because there is no wrong or right answer. And what could be right today will be wrong tomorrow.

## Don’t Forget about Yourself

What if your friend is talking about her parent that was *niftar*, and you feel uncomfortable?

First ask yourself why it makes you uncomfortable. Figuring out that answer could solve most of the problem. Perhaps you want to talk about it with an adult to help you gain clarity.

If the *petirah* is very fresh (within the first year), try to give her a listening ear. She needs it. If it is already more than that and you feel she is obsessively talking about it, it is okay to tell her that sometimes you reach the point when you feel you can’t listen anymore. Maybe the two of you can talk it out. What can you say when you feel like you can’t listen anymore? What can the two of you talk about instead? Maybe it means it is time to go bake a cake or exercise together.

Working it out together will benefit both of you very much.

## Not Remembering the Parent

Your friend’s parent might have died when she was only a baby. Maybe she has a stepparent, and they have a great relationship. Yet, she still might have pain over the fact that she never knew her parent. Her pain probably won’t be constant, but anything might trigger it. Even if it seems random to you, don’t minimize your friend’s grief. It’s valid.

If at times your friend expresses that she wishes she understood better where she comes from, or she wonders what life would be like with her biological parent, you might think: *Why does it matter? She has such a good, regular life.*

Don’t push her feelings away. They are valid and real.

Listen and try to understand.



## Shhh, It's a Secret!

Is it? Your friend's father died while she was in elementary school. You only met her in high school. And she never said a word to you. Should you bring it up?

Follow her lead. She might be scared of telling you that she is different. She might be scared of you treating her like a *nebach* once she tells you. It might be so painful for her that she simply can't get the words out of her mouth.

At times, you might think you have the perfect opportunity to say something. Only you know your friend and your relationship well enough to know if you really should. If you feel that the situation lends itself to saying something in a sensitive matter, say it as a statement rather than a question. This lets your friend know that you know, and it gives her the opportunity to continue the conversation if she desires, but she won't feel forced to offer information that she doesn't want to share. However, this should be done when it is just the two of you alone in a non-public place. Not in school, and not even in a small group.

If you sense that she really doesn't want to talk about it, respect that and drop the subject.

## When She Mentions It Infrequently

What if she brings it up very rarely? Then you have a little more permission to speak to her about it. The main thing she probably wants from you is to know you won't start treating her differently just because she has a different family situation.

Although Penina was really good friends with Shainy, she only brought up the topic about not having a father one or two times in their four years of knowing each other. When Penina's first nephew, a boy, was born, Shainy wasn't sure if she should say something or not. She waited until after the *bris*, when she heard the name. She looked at her friend and said, "Is he named after your father?" Penina nodded but didn't say anything further. Shainy was curious how Penina felt about it. She wanted to ask. But it was clear that Penina didn't want

to talk about it and Shainy knew she had to respect that. So as much as she wanted to continue the conversation, she didn't.

Trust your relationship. Trust your instincts. You probably know your friend well enough to know what is okay and what isn't. Just make sure your desire to ask isn't fueled by your own curiosity.

## Small Triggers

Let's say you're out with friends having a blast. Suddenly your friend who is grieving hears or sees something that brings up a memory and triggers her so deeply. She runs away crying or becomes very quiet and serious. Don't judge her for it. Let her be. To you it might seem like whatever happened was minor. To her it obviously isn't a small deal.

You can ask her if she wants to talk about it or if she prefers to be by herself for a little bit. If she chooses to stay by herself for a bit, it is okay for the rest of the group to continue having fun. While she needs the message of, "I am here for you," that doesn't mean you are enslaved to her moods. When she is ready, she will rejoin the group.

## Tapping into Empathy

Perhaps she'll tell you to continue enjoying yourselves and that she'll join you when she is ready, but you think she really does want company.

Put yourself in her place. What would you like if you were in this situation? This is called empathy. And then you can say to her, "I think I would like company if this was me. Would it be okay for me to stay with you for a few minutes?"

## Her Feelings of Disloyalty

Your friend might tell you she's afraid to move on because she thinks that if she has fun, it's as if she's saying she's okay without her parent. Maybe you'll want to tell her, "C'mon, that's ridiculous! You know your mother was always into you having a good time with friends!" Or,



“You know your father would want you to be happy.” You might want to tell her, “You’re not forgetting. You’re just having some fun. Nothing is wrong with that.”

Don’t argue with her feelings. Validate them.

Stop and listen. Your friend’s feelings are real.

Ask her how you can be there for her. Maybe before or after you do a fun activity, she would like to talk about her parent. Maybe she’ll want to do something as a *zechus* for the *neshamah*, such as saying a *perek* of *Tehillim* before the fun begins, or giving a few coins to *tzedakah l’iluy nishmas*.

But don’t push her feelings away.

## Morbid Humor

Some people have a dark or morbid sense of humor. It could be their personality or it could be a coping skill. Whatever the reason, you might hear this kind of humor from your friend who has lost a parent. It could come out as sarcastic comments such as, “I went on a great shopping spree with my dead mother,” or, “The *chazzan* this year wasn’t my father. It is really not nice that they hired someone else after all his years of devoted service.” She might make comments such as “What? A hospital is a place where mothers have babies? Oops, I thought it was a place where young parents die.” Or she might tell you that when a telemarketer called asking for her father, she strung him along until she finally blurted out that he is dead!

If this is something you feel comfortable with and you want to go along and laugh with her, that’s okay. If it makes you feel uncomfortable, then just stay quiet. You don’t need to respond or laugh along. If you already have a very open relationship, you can tell her this kind of humor makes you uncomfortable. It’s okay to be honest with yourself and with your friends; this will ultimately improve your relationship.

## An Upcoming Yahrzeit

What should you do? You know that your friend’s parent’s *yahrzeit* is coming up. Should you say something or not? Ignoring something significant can be hurtful.

Pushing yourself on your friend can be hurtful as well. It is appropriate to say, “I know the *yahrzeit* is coming up. Do you want any support?”

She might ask you to leave her alone. She might say, “Just let me know that you’re thinking of me.” Alternatively, she might want to talk about her parent and share some memories. Respect her needs, even if you think she could benefit from something different.

It is always helpful if your friend can share what she needs.

Fraidel let her close friend know that all she wants on the day of her father’s *yahrzeit* is for people to let her know they’re thinking of her. No comments such as, “I’m sorry,” and no requests to talk about her father either. Her friend passed this on to their other friends. Fraidel received an overwhelming amount of phone calls, messages and notes letting her know what people had done as a *zechus* for her father. She felt remembered and cared about.

If circumstances allow, you could also drop off a “Thinking of You” balloon or an iced coffee and donut for when she returns from the cemetery or from school that day.

The first *yahrzeit* might be different from the following ones. So what should you do? Ask.

## Don’t Be a Martyr

As a caring and kind person, you want to do whatever you possibly can for your friend. Sometimes, though, this can take more of a toll on you than you realize.

What should you do if you feel the relationship is becoming too intense?

You might start telling yourself to stop being so selfish. How could you be such an uncaring friend? You must be so self-absorbed that you would rather read a book or sit around schmoozing with your mother and sisters than run to the phone to talk to the friend who really needs you.

Not true! By denying your feelings, you are turning yourself into a martyr, and martyr relationships don’t work. Of course, there are times when you will gladly go



out of your comfort zone or change your plans to help a friend. But when it is constant or expected, it starts turning into martyrdom, and this will drain you.

What should you do in this circumstance?

## Keep Your Relationship Healthy

It is time to find your voice.

Like Chana Perel. After her friend Tzippy's father died, Chana Perel gave 100% of herself to her friend. But after a few months, it was becoming too much for her to always be there for Tzippy, all the time, and to prioritize Tzippy's needs regardless of whatever else was going on in her own life.

One day, Chana Perel invited Tzippy to take a walk with her, and in a pleasant, non-accusing tone, Chana Perel explained to Tzippy that she sometimes felt suffocated. She was still her close friend, and she would still be there for her. But sometimes she might have to say, "Now isn't a good time." It was hard for Tzippy to hear this. And it's hard to feel that you hurt a friend. But Chana Perel did nothing wrong. She found her voice. Doing so is the healthiest way to sustain a good relationship.

Devora Baila had a different problem. Her friend Simi was moody and unpredictable; she would back out of their plans together without warning, leaving Devora Baila hanging. At first Devora Baila was okay with it even if she was disappointed. But after it happened a few times, she felt as if theirs was a one-way friendship—Devora Baila did whatever she could for Simi, but Simi wasn't considering Devora Baila's feelings and needs.

Like Chana Perel, it was time to find her voice. Devora Baila explained to Simi that she felt hurt when Simi constantly changed plans on her. It left her stuck and disrupted her day. She understood that Simi was sometimes hit with such strong pangs of grief that she just wasn't in the mood to go anywhere. At the same time, it wasn't fair to constantly back out on your best friend.

Devora Baila also took steps to cover her bases. She tried to make plans with at least one other friend besides Simi so that if Simi did back out, Devora Baila wasn't left alone.

## Regular Teen Issues

Some issues that might come up are really issues that can come up in any situation. Imagine a friend whose parents are building a new house. She might talk nonstop about the gorgeous pool being installed, the stunning bedroom she'll have to herself or the most amazing kitchen.

You might feel overloaded by the constant updates, to the point that you've had enough. How would you tell this to your friend?

You can say what you need to say in a sensitive way.

It isn't really different with your friend who lost a parent. You will want to be more sensitive in this case, but it is okay to point out that when she talks obsessively about her mentors or the most amazing friends she made through Links, it can be redundant. It doesn't mean she should never mention it again, it just means not to stick it in every second, whether or not it is relevant.

## What She's Really Saying

If your friend has a stepparent, she might complain to you about how awful he or she is.

It might be hard for you to listen to awful things about another person. And you surely don't want to say something to your friend that would make her feel that you don't get it. But you also don't want to feed into her negativity.

What you can do is listen *without* feeding into the negativity. Don't say, "That is crazy. I feel so bad for you. How can she do that?" Instead, just say, "I understand. I know this is so hard."

Remind yourself that you don't have to adopt your friend's view of her stepparent. Sometimes, complaining about a person is easier than complaining about a situation. Your friend might be having a very hard time with the adjustment. Or it could be that she really likes her stepparent but is too afraid to admit it. Maybe she's afraid that if she likes her stepparent, she's being disloyal to her parent who passed away.

You don't have to agree or disagree with your friend. Just listening to her lets her know you're there for her.



## Perfect Words Aren't Enough

You might be blessed from Hashem to always know the perfect words to share. But remember, it isn't only the words you use, but the tone that is so important.

As Shifra shared, one friend always had the right words, but she said them in such a sugary tone of voice that Shifra didn't hear the words. Instead, she heard: *You are a nebach, and I will treat you as such.*

## We All Show Emotions Differently

If a non-emotional friend lost a parent and you are a more emotional type of person, this can be confusing to you. You might wonder why it seems that your friend has it all together while you are falling apart.

There is nothing wrong with you. Your friend might not be sharing her feelings with you, but she could very well be falling apart behind closed doors. Perhaps your friend is just trying to survive right now, which doesn't leave room for really being in touch with her feelings, whereas you have more emotional space to feel the pain. Let's say you're on a *Chol Hamoed* trip with your family and find yourself crying for your friend who will never have her full family together again. She, on the other hand, is just focused on surviving and getting through Yom Tov.

## Get Help in Handling Your Relationship

Your relationship with your friend might be changing, and it can feel extremely overwhelming. It is all so new for you. You might be dealing with fear if your friend seems to be losing it. You might feel overwhelmed by the many long and introspective conversations you have been having with her. You might feel confused about what to say or what not to say or even just unsure of what your role is in this new relationship that isn't really new. Or you might feel very impacted by the death of your friend's parent. It is very normal to reach out for help, whether from a parent, teacher, mentor or therapist. By gaining the tools to maintain proper

roles, communication and boundaries, you are making yourself into a healthier person, who will in turn be better equipped to help your friend.

You may need help with questions such as:

- She is so angry at Hashem. How should I respond to such comments?
- How can I be there for my friend every second of the day? Is this too much for me?
- How should I know if I should talk or listen?
- Am I benefitting my friend by listening, or am I feeding into the negativity?

## What You Can't Do – and What You Can Do

As a caring person you might badly wish to take away your friend's pain. You can't. What you can do is *daven* for her, show her that you are there for her, and again, speak to an adult. By speaking to an adult and getting clarity for yourself, you will gain confidence in talking to and helping your friend in the best way possible.

## It Happens to the Best of Us

A theme that runs through this article is to listen and validate. Chances are that at some point you are going to be rethinking a conversation and going into panic mode. Maybe you told your friend to just get over it already or she complained that you were so impatient. Don't be so hard on yourself. You are human. If it is appropriate for you to go back to her and say, "Hey, I was feeling that maybe I didn't validate you enough. I'm sorry," then do it. But it might be better to just leave it. Sometimes we make mistakes, and that's okay. You will try harder next time. Often, there isn't a clear right or wrong because what she'll need will vary. Trust yourself and forgive yourself.

## The Trivial Things in Your Life

As a sensitive person, you might see what your friend is going through and start feeling terribly guilty about



the things you worry about. You might feel bad that you are embarrassed of your parents (guess what? Most teenagers are!). You might judge yourself for being annoyed at your mother for insisting that you stay home and help out on Thursday nights. Or you might feel so wrong for being frustrated that your latest Amazon order hasn't arrived yet. Maybe you'll feel bad about stressing out about something "so unimportant" as your mark on a test.

Guess what? You still need to be normal. Just because you have your small worries doesn't mean you care any less about your friend. Do you want to work on putting things into perspective? You can. It never hurts to work on you. But do it slowly. If you decide that you don't care about anything other than people dying, you won't end up not caring about other things; you will end up burying your feelings about anything that is important to you. And one day it will all explode. Don't make changes by burying your real feelings. Make changes by working on yourself in a slow and steady fashion.

## Hashem Put You Here

Nothing in this world is random. This includes the family you were born into, as well as who your classmates are. If you find yourself in an atypical situation with a friend,

it didn't happen by mistake. Hashem is giving you a tailormade opportunity to learn about yourself and to grow. Your friend is embarking on a new journey, and you have the chance to travel alongside her, to grow and change into a better person.

## Your Personal Journey

You might need to learn how to be a better listener, or when to hold back from expressing something you want to say so badly. You might learn how to show empathy, how not to judge others, or to recognize that you don't know what is going on behind closed doors. You might cultivate a whole new level of sensitivity. You might learn about maintaining proper boundaries, how to speak up for yourself and how not to be a martyr in a relationship. You might learn to reach out for help when you need it. You might learn that you can't change others, but you can change yourself, which oftentimes creates changes in others.

These new lessons can be brought into your current relationships, and the tools you cultivate now will help you in future relationships. This life circumstance is not an opportunity you would ever ask for, but once you have it, take advantage and grow from it.

May Hashem bring an end to all suffering with the coming of the *geulah sheleimah*.



# JUST SO YOU KNOW: A SUMMARY

## **A New Experience**

Your friend needs to learn how to live in a new world. You are part of that new world. Give her time and space. She still needs you. She will come back to you.

Each person is so different. There can't be a list of right and wrong things to do and say because everyone responds so differently in grief. What works for one girl might be devastating for the next girl.

## **Learning the Skill of Communication**

Communication is the way to go. Ask and ask again what she wants.

Trust yourself. Do or say what you think is the right thing. There is no clear right or wrong because each person and circumstance is so different.

Your friend's mood can change from day to day or from one circumstance to the next. What works for your friend today might seem offensive to her tomorrow. It is likely that you will sometimes say the wrong thing – and that's okay.

Ask your friend what she needs: a listening ear, feedback, a hug or a special lunch or treat?

## **When She Comes Back to School**

When your best friend comes back to school after *shivah*, try to talk to her to see if she needs anything from you to help ease the transition.

If the girl is a classmate but not a close friend, don't ignore what she just went through, but don't impose either. A simple welcome back is appropriate.

## **Listen and Validate Her Feelings**

Your friend might be struggling with intense emotions such as anger, jealousy, or guilt. Don't try to fix her.

Listen and validate.

When there is a *simchah*, emotions can be heightened. It isn't helpful to tell your friend to appreciate the *berachah*; rather, listen to her feelings and concerns and see if there is any way you can help. Maybe talk through the *simchah* with her to help her prepare emotionally for some of the challenges she might face.

## **Follow Her Lead**

How should you know if you should mention the *niftar* or not? Follow your friend's lead.

Even if it is hard for you to understand, please validate a friend who feels pain that she doesn't remember her parent. Grieving for a parent that a person never knew is a real thing.

If your friend never brought up the fact that she doesn't have a parent, use common sense whether to bring it up or not. If the right moment presents itself, you can mention it and see how she responds. But remember, this should never be an outgrowth of your own curiosity.

If something triggers your friend, even if it seems like a little thing to you, it isn't to her. Don't just push it away. Listen and validate.

If your friend struggles with feelings of disloyalty about moving on, listen to her and validate her. While it could be true that her deceased parent wants her to be busy with regular teen activities, the feelings of disloyalty are real.

## **Morbid Humor**

Morbid humor. Some people hate it and some people love it. If you and your friend both like it, and you want to laugh hysterically over dead-people jokes, go for it. If she expresses herself this way, but you are uncomfortable with it, it is okay to ask her not to do so around you.



## **Yahrtzeit**

If the *yahrtzeit* is coming up, you can ask your friend if there is any way to support her. Do what she asks for even if you think a different way would be better.

## **Speaking Up**

Martyr relationships don't work. If you are feeling taken advantage of, like you don't have a voice or that you are enslaved to your friend's whims, you are being a martyr. Your friendship can flourish if you stop the martyrdom and are more open with her.

Sometimes an issue you are having with a friend can really be a regular teen issue that is showing up as a grief issue. As with other friends, it is okay to gently state your needs, or if the situation allows for it, to suggest that she go for help.

Remember, it isn't just the words that you say, but the tone that you use that matters.

## **Getting Help for Yourself**

It might seem you are mourning the loss of your friend's parent more than she is. This is often due to differing personalities and the different environments in which you are raised. It is wise to speak to an adult

to explore how this loss impacted you and to help you process it properly.

Get support and clarity for yourself. Speaking to a teacher, mentor, therapist or parent to get guidance on this new twist in your friendship will help you become more comfortable and confident. This is one of the best ways to help your friend.

## **Showing Support**

As much as you might want to, you can't alleviate your friend's pain. *Davening* for her and asking her how you can support her shows her how much you care. This will help her get through this rough time.

Sometimes you will say the wrong thing. That is normal and to be expected.

You can still be a normal teen and care about regular things. This doesn't make you into a bad person or an uncaring friend.

## **Your Opportunity for Growth**

Your friend is now being forced to embark on a new journey of self-discovery; you are being taken along for the ride. You can learn so much about yourself and so much about relationships, giving you tools that will benefit you for a lifetime.