

What to Say/Not Say to Survivors of Tragedy

What to Say

"Can you tell me what happened?"

"I'm so sorry."

"This must be difficult for you."

"I don't know what to say."

"Everyone grieves differently."

"It's normal to feel _____ under these circumstances."

"It's OK to feel _____."

What Not to Say

"I know how you feel."

"Don't feel _."

"It will be better tomorrow."

"You can always rebuild."

"At least you're not hurt."

"What you need to do . . ."

"Don't cry."

"He's out of his pain."

"He's in a better place."

"Calm down."

Summary

- A. Speak with the survivor in **brief sentences**. Don't go "on and on".
- B. If you have nothing to say, **say nothing**.
- C. Don't say things that attempt to "**make things better**" or that try to lessen the survivors pain.
- D. Use **tentative** words like
 - "Perhaps" • "Maybe"
 - "You might" • "Have you considered _____?"
- E. **Don't** use words like . . .
 - "You should . . ."
 - "I want you to . . ."
 - "If I were you . . ."
 - "Don't _____."
 - "The best thing for you to do . . ."