



## **When Good Intentions Go Bad: Common Phrases That Inadvertently Minimize Loss**

### **“It was God’s will”**

This statement can paint God as a cruel force that takes people away from those who love them without any consideration for the survivor. It negates the loss – even if the bereaved fully believes that it was God’s will, they are “allowed” to miss the person and deeply feel the loss.

### **“I know just how you feel”**

Every person is unique. Every relationship is one-of-a-kind. We cannot possibly know how someone else feels when a death occurs, for that is a relationship we will never experience.

### **“Time has passed since he/she died. Aren’t you over it yet?”**

There is NO time limit on grief. Grieving may take on different forms that may last a lifetime. Being “over it” may never ring true...and that’s perfectly okay.

### **“Be grateful that you still have \_\_\_\_\_” (another parent, friend, family member, etc.)**

We will *always* miss those who are lost, regardless of if we do have other people in our lives. The presence of others does not override our love for those who are gone.

### **“We are never given more than we can handle”**

The family and friends of someone who committed suicide may argue this statement. Sometimes the world is too much to bear. Inability to cope is not necessarily related to a lack of strength. Bereaved people are in real pain, and they deserve reassurance and support, not criticism of their coping skills.

### **“He/she lived a good life and it was his/her time to die”**

There is no convenient time to die. Whether someone was one or one hundred, when a life ends there is grief. Even if the death ends some sort of suffering for the person who passes, there will still be pain for the survivors left behind.

### **“I’m Sorry”**

This is the most automatic response most of us have when we learn someone has died. We are sorry that a life has ended, we are sorry that people are grieving, we are sorry for our own mortality of which we have just been reminded. To the bereaved, however, these words require a response we often do not feel. What do you say to, “I’m sorry”? “Thank you?”



“That’s all right?” There is no adequate response, and when the bereaved has heard “I’m sorry” time and time again, the words lose their meaning.

**“You must be strong for \_\_\_\_\_ (your siblings, family, friends, etc.)”**

Someone in grief does not need to be strong for anyone, including themselves. By insisting that people be strong we are asking them to deny their very real emotions. What is (usually) most helpful is encouraging people to be honest, to be real, and not asking them to put on a show.

**“Be more positive – stop complaining”**

When someone is in grief they will experience a wide range of emotions, and are *entitled to them all*. Feeling the whole array, and wanting to discuss them, should not be discouraged or judged as “complaints”.