



# THE COURAGE TO COMFORT

By Amy Weir

I was 13 years old when my mother died of breast cancer. The awkward beginning of my teenage years, mixed with the realities accompanying a great loss, made that time in my life very stormy. Looking back, I realize that there were some wonderful friends around me, even though I felt so alone. They gave me the comfort and friendship I desperately needed, right when I needed it.

Sometimes it can be hard to know what to do when a friend suffers a tragedy, even if the event is not as severe as losing a loved one. But with a little courage, you can do a lot of good. Remember that everyone grieves differently. If you are unsure about how to help, pray for guidance and follow the Spirit. Here are some ideas that might help you.



*When my mother died, I needed comfort and understanding. Here are some things that helped me.*

## Act Normal

One of the worst memories I have of the difficult time following my mother's death is of walking into junior high school the day after the funeral. An uncomfortable silence fell on the hallway, and everyone stared at me as I made my way to my locker. I am sure they just felt bad for me and didn't know what to say, but I felt so exposed, as though I were on display.

Those first few days back at school were rough, and I really appreciated my close friends who acted normal around me. As always, they joked around, talked about which boys they thought were cutest, and complained about upcoming school assignments. After school we went to the movies, took bike rides, or just hung out. This "normal" time with them was a big relief from the spotlight that seemed to follow me.



### **Be Sensitive**

Avoid saying “Call me if you need anything” unless you are a close friend. This may seem like odd advice, but I remember how many people told me that. I know they meant well, but they were practically strangers. They had hardly ever spoken to me before, so why would I call them for sympathy or help? If you don’t know the person well, just say something like, “I’m really sorry about your loss,” or “I’m really sorry that happened to you.” You don’t need to promise that you will be waiting for a call for help.

If you *are* close, go ahead and tell your friend that you are available to talk or help, or take the initiative and call to see how things are going. Just be sure to act cheerful instead of complaining about your own troubles, which may only add to your friend’s emotional burdens. Be of good cheer (see D&C 78:18). It is one of the best gifts you can give to a friend in need.

### **Make a Gesture**

Although I disliked awkward stares and too much attention, I did appreciate knowing that people cared about me. I still have the sympathy card my best friend had the whole band class sign for me. I remember feeling so grateful to have some tangible support I could hold in my hands. The card gave me strength and made me feel less lonely. Even now, more than 20 years later, when I have troubles I get the card out and look over the old signatures, picture my classmates’ faces, and chuckle at how horrible our eighth-grade band sounded. The card reminds me that others cared about me even when I felt totally alone.

Your gesture doesn’t have to be a card; it could be a short note, a small gift, or even just a listening ear. Don’t be afraid to do something kind; your friend needs all the kindness you can give.

### **Be Patient**

When my mother died I was so blinded by my own grief that it took me a while to realize how much I needed and appreciated my friends’ efforts, so don’t get discouraged if your friend doesn’t respond right away. The bigger the tragedy, the longer it may take to heal, and the longer it may be before your friend is back to normal.

### **Remember the Lord’s Promises**

Alma tells us that one of our baptismal covenants is to “bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light,” and to “mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort” (Mosiah 18:8–9). You may be nervous about trying to comfort a friend, but remember that “the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them” (1 Nephi 3:7). Heavenly Father will not only help you know what you can do for your friend, but He will also prepare a way for you to do it. He will give you the courage to comfort. ■