

# “What Can I Do to Help?”

## Nine From-the-Heart Answers A Friend in Crisis Would Like to Give You

*The following suggestions come from men and women coping with one of many of life’s surprises including a life-threatening illness. They conveyed these tips to Donna Authers, caregiver, writer and inspirational speaker, to share with others.*

**“Don’t ask me how to help.”** If you see a way in which to help, just do it. Don’t put the burden of giving you something to do on the sick person.

**“Don’t make me talk about my situation.”** Remember the patient has probably talked endlessly to their immediate family, doctors or counselors about their options. It is unnerving to continually be asked, “How are you – how are you, really?”

**“Listen to me.”** When your friend or loved one is ready to talk, she will initiate the conversation about their condition and concerns. Be ready to listen—even if the topic is one you’d rather avoid. There may be no need for advice, but she needs to be heard.

**“Help alleviate my fears.”** Gently encourage your loved one to talk about any fears they have. Help ease their concern, using outside help if necessary, to bring peace. If they are facing death, familiarize yourself with the most common fears of dying.

**“Help me maintain my dignity and control.”** Although you might want to do everything you can when you learn of his trouble, continue to behave normally. Even if he has a terminal diagnosis, don’t hover over him or treat him as an invalid prematurely.

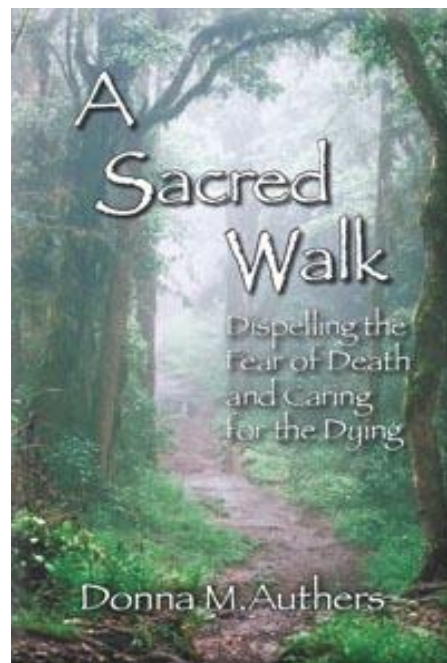
**“Reassure me that my life mattered.”** Take every opportunity to express appreciation for their past accomplishments and what they have meant to you. Rebuilding their sense of self-worth is a great gift.

**“Share your faith with me.”** Skeptics and believers alike are comforted by the assurance that God cares about them. Give them hope for a bright future, even hope in a life after death. If you can’t, encourage a discussion with a pastor or a believing friend.

**“Create a peaceful atmosphere for me.”** Help de-stress the environment. Surround her with her favorite things: pictures, flowers, music, and above all, people. Even in the final phase of life, the patient does not want to be surrounded by reminders of death and dying. In that situation, free the area of clutter, harsh lights, and hide medical supplies.

**“Give me permission to go.”** This is the most difficult but one of the most meaningful services you can perform. By assuring your dying loved one that everything has been taken care of and that he will be remembered and cherished, you may be removing the final emotional obstacle to a peaceful passing.

*This tip sheet is adapted from the chapter “Walking Them Part Way Home.” Additional information on dispelling the fear of death and caring for the dying can be found in **A Sacred Walk** by Donna Authers.*



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