Avoiding the Clichés of Grief
Compiled by Angela Parkinson, Confucian Religious Advisor

We might mean well, but our words can also impact others negatively. Some ideas to try.

Don’t say: “Time heals all wounds.”
Try instead: “It must feel like this pain will never go away.”

Don’t say: “Everything happens for a reason.”
Try instead: “I don’t why know this happened. Some things in life cannot be fixed or even completely understood rationally—they can only be carried.”

Don’t say: “They’re in a better place now.” Or “They’re happy now that they’re with God/in a better place.”
Try instead: “I know you are hurting, and you should know that you made them so happy when they were alive.”

Don’t say: “You have to be strong! You’ve got to get a hold of yourself.”
Try instead: “Why not share how you feel with me so we can lean on each another?”

Don’t say: “Think of all your memories.”
Try instead: “I know memories are a poor substitute for having them with you, but I hope they will give you some comfort.”

Don’t say: “Big boys don’t cry.” Or “Tough up/cheer up.”
Try instead: “Don’t be embarrassed to cry.” Or, “It takes strength to cry and show your humanness/vulnerability.”

Don’t say: “You’re handling this so well.”
Try instead: “Don’t feel that you have to be strong for me.”

Don’t say: “It was God’s will.”
Try instead: “Something like this is so tragic, and I know that this makes no sense.”

Don’t say: “Life goes on.”
Try instead: “This sucks. I know it will be hard in the months to come to live with this pain. Know that I’m here.”

Instead of trying to find a reason for why the tragedy has happened...
Try instead: “I don’t know why this awful thing has happened.”

Instead of trying to offer (even helpful) advice...
Try instead: “I can’t tell you what to do because I’m not you, and I have never had this happen to me. But I love you, and I’m here for you.”