

Supporting someone who is grieving

Death doesn't just disrupt a person's life – it can change it forever. When someone you know experiences a bereavement, it may be hard to know what to say or how to offer comfort and support. This is particularly true if you have not experienced a bereavement yourself. There are many ways to support someone who is grieving.

How to help a bereaved person in the first few days after a death

Contact the bereaved person as soon as possible after the death. This might be a personal visit, telephone call, text message, sympathy card or flowers. Attend the funeral or memorial service if you can, they need to know that you care enough to support them through this difficult process.

How to support to someone who is grieving

Just be there:

One of the most important things you can do for a grieving person is to just be there. It's your support and caring presence that will help them cope with the pain and sadness they feel. If you can't think of something to say, a reassuring hug might be helpful, but check with them first.

Be a good listener:

Concentrate your efforts on listening carefully without judgement and with compassion.

Accept and acknowledge all feelings:

Let the grieving person know that it's okay to cry or not cry, to get angry, or to be distressed. Grief can be a highly emotional experience, so the bereaved need to feel free to express their feelings. Some people may prefer to keep their feelings more private. Grief is often described as an emotional roller coaster. Someone who has just experienced a death may feel fine one minute and overcome with emotion the next. This is a normal part of the grieving process.

Let the bereaved talk about the death:

People who are grieving may need to tell the story of the death over and over again, sometimes in detail. Be patient. Repeating the story is a way of processing the death. Assure the person that it is okay to talk about their thoughts and feelings.

Offer comfort and reassurance:

Tell the bereaved person that what they're feeling is okay. If you've gone through a similar loss, share your own experience if you think it would help. Keep in mind grief is individual and personal, and it's important to respect each other's way of grieving, even if we don't fully understand it.

Say the deceased's name:

As time passes the bereaved person will most likely be glad to know that the deceased is remembered.

Avoid platitudes:

Avoid saying things like "They are in a better place," "It is God's will," or "At least she or he is no longer suffering." These statements rarely provide comfort.

Share memories:

If you knew the deceased, share photos and stories about them in a note or email, or in person with the bereaved. Most bereaved people appreciate it when others remember and value the significance of their loss.

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Practical help for a grieving person

You can show the grieving person that you care by offering practical help, such as:

- » Do some of their housework, such as cleaning or washing.
- » Answer the telephone for them.
- » Bring over pre-cooked meals that only need to be reheated before serving.
- » Offer to pick up their children from school.

What can I say to someone who is grieving?

Not knowing what to say to comfort someone who has experienced a death may feel awkward. Try these suggestions:

- » Acknowledge the situation: "I heard that your _____ died." Use the word "died." Using the name of the deceased, tells the bereaved person you acknowledge the significance of their loss.
- » Express your concern: "I'm so sorry for your loss of _____"
- » Be genuine in your communication: "I'm not sure what to say, but I want you to know I care."

Grief doesn't have a timeline

Immediately following a loss, people are usually surrounded by support. A few weeks later, people often feel like everyone has moved on. Check in regularly, especially on significant days, milestones and anniversaries, be sensitive on these occasions. Keep in mind that it may take some time, even years, for them to adjust to life after a bereavement.

Caring for yourself after a loss

When we are grieving or supporting someone else who is grieving, our own needs may sometimes be neglected. Listening and sharing someone's pain, can be personally demanding and exhausting. Make sure you have supports for yourself and that you are not stopping yourself from grieving, and your own experiences of loss that may also be triggered

Life grows around grief

It is a common myth that people will 'get over' their grief. What happens is that a part of us will always grieve for the person who has died. In time the pain will lessen, but the sorrow we feel will always be part of us. There is no return to normal, instead we learn to live with a new kind of normal. We re-learn our world and re-learn ourselves within it.

Encourage them to accept help and support

Encourage the person who is grieving to seek help from other sources too. Support groups, the internet, books, brochures, counselling or other professional help may be useful for them. Other comforting things might include distractions, such as meditation, relaxation or just going out for a coffee.

When to seek further help?

Although grief can be very painful, most people find that with the support of family and friends and their own resources, they gradually find ways to live with the loss, and may not need to seek professional help.

However, sometimes the circumstances of the death are very distressing, such as a traumatic or sudden death that may make the grief chronic or prolonged. You might suggest your friend, relative or colleague seek professional help, if over time, they seem to be finding it difficult to manage their day to day life.