

Tip Sheet: Supporting a Grieving Person

It's often hard to know what to say or do when someone you care about is grieving. You may be afraid of intruding, saying the wrong thing, or making the person feel even worse. Or maybe you feel there's little you can do to make things better. While you can't take away the pain of the loss, you can provide much-needed comfort and support. There are many ways to help a grieving friend or family member, starting with letting the person know you care. The information below is general information that intended to help you support a grieving person. However, keep in mind that everyone handles grief in their own way. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to always try to respect the wishes of a grieving person whenever they are communicated to you.

Understanding Grief

The death of a loved one is one of life's most difficult experiences. The bereaved struggle with many intense and frightening emotions, including depression, anger, and guilt. Often, he or she feels isolated and alone in his or her grief, but having someone to lean on can help him or her through the grieving process.

Don't let discomfort prevent you from reaching out to someone grieving. Now, more than ever, your support is needed. You might not know exactly what to say or what to do, but that's okay. You don't need to have answers or give advice. The most important thing you can do for a grieving person is to simply be there; your support and caring presence will help him or her cope with the pain and begin to heal.

Understanding the Grief Process

The better your understanding of the grief process, the better equipped you'll be to help a bereaved friend, family member or co-worker:

- **There is no right or wrong way to grieve.** Grief does not always unfold in orderly, predictable stages. It can be an emotional rollercoaster, with unpredictable highs, lows, and setbacks. Everyone grieves differently, so avoid telling the bereaved what he or she "should" be feeling or doing.
- **Grief may involve extreme emotions and behaviors.** Feelings of guilt, anger, despair, and fear are common. A grieving person may yell to the heavens, obsess about the death, lash out at loved ones, or cry for hours on end. The bereaved need reassurance that what he or she feels is normal. Don't judge them or take his or her grief reactions personally.
- **There is no set timetable for grieving.** For many people, recovery after bereavement takes 18 to 24 months, but for others, the grieving process may be longer or shorter. Don't pressure the bereaved to move on or make them feel like they've been grieving too long. This can actually slow the healing process.

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What to Say to Someone Who Has Lost a Loved One

It is common to feel awkward when trying to comfort someone who is grieving. Many people do not know what to say or do. The following are suggestions to use as a guide.

- **Acknowledge the situation.** Example: "I heard that your ___ died." Use the word "died", as that will show that you are more open to talk about how the person really feels.
- **Express your concern.** Example: "I'm sorry to hear that this happened to you."
- **Be genuine in your communication and don't hide your feelings.** Example: "I'm not sure what to say, but I want you to know I care."
- **Offer your support.** Example: "Tell me what I can do for you."
- **Ask how he or she feels,** and don't assume you know how the bereaved person feels on any given day.

Listen with Compassion

Almost everyone worries about what to say to a grieving person. But knowing how to listen is much more important. Oftentimes, well-meaning people avoid talking about the death or mentioning the deceased person, but the bereaved need to feel that his or her loss is acknowledged, it's not too terrible to talk about, and his or her loved one won't be forgotten.

Offer Practical Assistance

It is difficult for many grieving people to ask for help. They might feel guilty about receiving so much attention, fear being a burden, or be too depressed to reach out. You can make it easier for them by making specific suggestions—such as, "I'm going to the market this afternoon. What can I bring you from there?" or "I've made beef stew for dinner. When can I come by and bring you some?"

Provide Ongoing Support

Grieving continues long after the funeral is over and the cards and flowers have stopped. The length of the grieving process varies from person to person. But in general, grief lasts much longer than most people expect. Your bereaved friend, family member, or coworker may benefit from your support for months or even years.

For additional information regarding assisting a grieving friend, family member or co-worker, contact SupportLinc at 888-881-5462.