



Supporting bereavement

What should I say?

It can be very difficult to know what to say or do when someone you know has lost someone close. We often want to offer support. However, it can be hard to know what to say for fear of being intrusive or saying the wrong thing. Then we find ourselves saying nothing, saying something careless without meaning to, or even avoiding the person. People who have lost a loved one need lots of support – even if it doesn't look that way.

Where to start

- It's better to do something than nothing – to acknowledge loss rather than ignore it.
- Look for invitations to talk from the other person. If they start talking about the person who has died, encourage them, even if it seems to make them upset.
- Be comforting when opening up the conversation rather than business-like.
- Try and create an environment where the person has the freedom to talk or not talk, according to what they want. "I'm around all day if you fancy a chat..."



What to expect

Words aren't always necessary, or easy. Sometimes it helps just to be with somebody, especially if they don't seem to want to talk.

Be prepared that the person may want to go over what has happened, or what's worrying them, over and over again. It can be a way of coming to terms with something.

Don't feel upset if your offers of support are rejected at first. Try later. Keep reminding them you are there so they know they can come back to you when and if they need to.

People who have been bereaved need support, but they may also need space. Be careful not to smother them with your sympathy, or to make them feel powerless.

Do's

- Just be with them, especially if they don't seem to want to talk. If they do start to talk about things that matter to them, encourage them by asking open-ended questions, or simply by really listening to them.
- Offer to help with practical things. A direct offer of help for something specific like "I can watch the children while you..." is more likely to be accepted than "I am here for anything you need."
- Make a special effort to check in with people in the weeks and months after the funeral, as these can be some of the most difficult and loneliest times.
- Invite them to join in social activities. Be understanding if they don't want to join you, but continue to offer as at some stage they may be really grateful that you asked.
- Remember that certain times of the year such as birthdays, anniversaries of a death, Christmas and other holiday times and New Year may be especially difficult. Try to remember these times and send a card or drop people a line.

Do not's

- Don't use clichés like “I know how you feel” or “time is a great healer”. They seem flippant and make it feel like you are minimising the loss.
- Don't make a judgement on how they are grieving or when they will be able to “move on”: everyone grieves at their own pace and in their own way.
- Don't say you know how they feel. Even if you've been through something similar, it's unlikely you'll be able to understand exactly how they're feeling.
- Don't act as if nothing has happened or avoid talking about the person who has died. It can be painful when people act as though the person who died never existed.
- If you have a faith, be careful how you express it to other people. They might not find it comforting or helpful to be told, for example, that “he or she is in a better place”.
- Acknowledge your sadness but be careful not to make conversations all about you and how difficult you're finding it.
- Don't assume that because someone seems to be coping they are, or that they don't need your help.
- Try not to dominate the conversation, and don't push them to talk if they don't want to.

For more help and support

- **Cruse Bereavement Care** provides support, advice and information to children, young people and adults when someone dies. www.cruse.org.uk
- **The Compassionate Friends** is a charitable organisation of bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents dedicated to the support and care of other bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents who have suffered the death of a child/children. www.tcf.org.uk
- Contact your local hospice: www.hospiceuk.org/findahospice



 hospice^{UK}
Compassionate
Employers

Hospice UK's Compassionate Employers programme helps companies to better support their employees who are affected by terminal illness, caring responsibilities or bereavement.

To find out more and get in touch visit:
www.hospiceuk.org/compassionate-employers



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www.dyingmatters.org