



Supporting Others Through Loss and Grief

Offering comfort and support to your family, friends and community

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Things to Remember When Supporting a Grieving Person

Acknowledge the loss as soon as you can after you get the news

Send a card with a note of personal condolence. Don't let fear that you won't say or do the right thing hold you back from talking with the grieving person. If you don't acknowledge it the first time you see them, remember it's never too late, and saying nothing is worse than saying something awkward.

Be genuine by being yourself

Your connection with the bereaved person should be a continuation of your usual relationship with them.

Get good information about grief so that you can understand the normal responses and process of grieving

Grief is a natural and necessary process that helps the bereaved person to adjust to life without the person who died.

Don't be afraid to talk about the person who has died.

Talk about what you miss and what was important to you about the person who died. This reminds the bereaved that their loved one was loved and liked and respected and is remembered and missed.

Be willing to listen.

Allowing the bereaved to talk and repeat their story will help them to process their thoughts and feelings. Sharing memories of times spent with the person who died can be very comforting for you and the bereaved person.

Accept that you cannot take the pain away

The death of someone important is painful. Trying to "cheer up" a bereaved person denies the significance and depth of their grief. You don't have to fix anything. Just being there is the most important thing you can do.

Reach out to offer support

Be there by making regular contact over time. Many bereaved people find it hard to reach out or are concerned about being a burden on friends and family. Your initiative in keeping in touch will be appreciated.

Be patient

Mourning takes lots of time and grief never entirely goes away. The bereaved will have ups and downs, be flexible in how you offer support. Don't try to accelerate the grief process.

Understand that everyone grieves in their own way and at their own pace

How we grieve is the result of our history of loss, our relationship with the deceased and many more factors. Accept the bereaved person's evaluation of the significance of the loss and depth of their feelings.

Remember there is no right way to grieve

Avoid criticizing how someone is grieving; you cannot know what is best for them. However, if you are concerned, encourage them to take care of themselves by getting professional help.

Expect that your own grief may be triggered

Your feelings may be related to this loss or to a loss that happened in your past. Ask yourself: Does the bereaved person want to know? Will it feel helpful to them now?

Remember to take good care of yourself

Don't be afraid to say that my pain is too hard for you to watch whenever that's true for you. Your needs are valid too and it's important for you to find ways to get support, from friends or family or a group or a counselor.

Just Listen

From "Kitchen Table Wisdom" by Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D.

I suspect that the most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. *Just listen*. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention. And especially if it's given from the heart. When people are talking, there's no need to do anything but receive them. Just take them in. Listen to what they're saying. Care about it.

Most times caring about it is even more important than understanding it. Most of us don't value ourselves or our love enough to know this. It has taken me a long time to believe in the power of simply saying, "*I'm so sorry*," when someone is in pain. And meaning it.

One of my patients told me that when she tried to tell her story people often interrupted to tell her that they once had something just like that happen to them. Subtly her pain became a story about them. Eventually she stopped talking to most people. It was just too lonely.

We connect through listening. When we interrupt what someone is saying to let them know that we understand, we move the focus of attention to ourselves. When we listen, they know we care. Many people with cancer talk about the relief of having someone just listen.

I have even learned to respond to someone crying by just listening. In the old days I used to reach for the tissues, until I realized that passing a person a tissue may be just another way to shut them down, to take them out of their experience of sadness and grief. Now I just listen. When they have cried all they need to cry, they find me there with them.

This simple thing has not been that easy to learn. It certainly went against everything I had been taught since I was very young. I thought people listened only because they were too timid to speak or did not know the answer. A loving silence often has far more power to heal and to connect than the most well-intentioned words.

The Art of Companionship

- Companionship is about honouring the spirit; it is not about focusing on the intellect.
- Companionship is about curiosity; it is not about expertise.
- Companionship is about learning from others; it is not about teaching them.
- Companionship is about walking alongside; it is not about leading.
- Companionship is about being still; it is not about frantic movement forward.
- Companionship is about discovering the gifts of sacred silence; it is not about filling every painful moment with words.
- Companionship is about listening with the heart; it is not about analyzing with the head.
- Companionship is about bearing witness to the struggles of others; it is not about directing those struggles.
- Companionship is about being present to another person's pain; it is not about taking away the pain.
- Companionship is about respecting disorder and confusion; it is not about imposing order and logic.
- Companionship is about going into the wilderness of the soul with another human being; it is not about thinking you are responsible for finding the way out.

Alan Wolfelt

What to Say, What Not to Say to Someone Who is Grieving

When we are reaching out to someone who is grieving it is sometimes hard to know what to say. In our own discomfort we fall back on clichés. While well meant, they are usually not helpful and often make the grieving person feel worse.

Please Do Not Say:

- I know just how you feel.
- Be thankful they weren't aware/in pain at the end.
- They had a good life.

Because:

- We are justifying the death from our perspective, not from the view of the grieving person. This discounts their pain.

Say Instead:

- It must have been difficult to watch them in pain all that time.
- I still miss them.

Please Do Not Say:

- It is best to put this painful experience out of your mind.
- Your grief will lessen in time.
- You need to get on with your life.

Because:

- These types of statements put limits on a person's grief. Each of us needs to grieve in our own way and in our own time.

Say Instead:

- I hope others are not trying to hurry you through your grief.
- This must be a very hard time for you.
- I have heard that each person grieves in their own way and in their own time.

Please Do Not Say:

- I know someone who had two family members die at the same time.
- At least you have others in your family.
- There are other people worse off than you.

Because:

- These statements discount the impact of the death on the grieving person.

Say Instead:

- I've been thinking about you.
- Expressing your tears and your pain will help you feel better eventually.

Please Do Not Say:

- You shouldn't get so upset.
- Your loved one wouldn't want you to be so sad.
- You can't stay sad forever.

Because:

- You deny the fact that being upset and expressing strong emotions is a very necessary part of the healing.

Say Instead:

- This must be so hard.
- Expressing your tears and your pain will help you feel better eventually.

Please Do Not Say:

- God needed them in heaven.
- It was God's will.
- God does not give you more than you can handle.

Because:

- These statements assume that we know God's will.

Say Instead:

- It must be hard to understand why these things happen.
- Sometimes these things are just not fair.
- There is no way to justify why this happened



Compassionate end-of-life and grief support for Yukoners

Hospice Yukon offers grief support for individuals and families, including children and teens. Our services include counselling (in person, by telephone, or online), Healing Touch, a variety of grief groups, educational workshops, and a lending library. Please contact us for information about current offerings.

Hospice Yukon is open

Monday to Friday

11:30am - 3:00pm

409 Jarvis Street

Whitehorse, YT, Y1A 3G0

867-667-7429

info@hospiceyukon.net

www.hospiceyukon.net