



Helping others through their grief journey

Grief and loss are a natural and normal part of life. People may respond with intense grief reactions such as pain, anguish, and physical exhaustion. Over time, most people move from an acute experience of grief to integrated grief. Eventually they can find the courage to build hope and rekindle the desire to live a full and meaningful life.

Grief is also an individual experience and can be complicated, chaotic, or unexpected. It is helpful when supporting a grieving person, to allow them to explore their emotions fully and to grieve freely.

When providing support for a grieving person you may observe some of the following grief reactions:

Emotions – numbness, anger, denial, fear, sadness, yearning, anxiety, loneliness, guilt, shock, and relief.

Thoughts – confusion, doubts, disbelief, forgetfulness, difficulty concentrating and making decisions.

Behaviour – withdrawal, impaired work performance or avoiding reminders.

Physical – tightness in the chest, restlessness, exhaustion, loss of appetite, headaches, insomnia, gastrointestinal disturbance.

Social – withdrawal from others, changes in relationships with others.

Spiritual responses – questioning the purpose or meaning of life, loss of faith, questioning religious beliefs or experiencing a sense of the presence of the person who died.

How to care for a grieving person

Listening: listen attentively to understand the individual experience of the person who is grieving. The person may repeat their story many times and this repetition is part of their healing process. There is no need to fix a problem or give advice. Simply listen and understand.

Avoid Cliché's: some phrases or cliché's may be hurtful to a grieving person such as, "I know how you feel." "At least she is no longer in pain." "Time heals all." It is better to be present and acknowledge the person's suffering rather than try to take away their pain.

Compassion: a person's story and experience of grief is unique and subjective. Listen without judgement to the meaning the person gives to the loss and how he/she conveys the circumstances of the loss. Allow the person to express the depth of their sorrow and pain with the understanding that tears and other demonstrative behaviours of grief are not a sign of weakness or a mental health concern.

Practical assistance: ask them if there is anything that they might like to do, offer them a meal, answer the phone, or any small task that will show that you care. Often support is offered shortly after a person dies but remember to continue support as needed for the coming weeks and months.



Holidays and significant events: can sometimes be 'triggers' for the grieving person. Other reminders may come in many forms such as music, smells, anniversaries, people, or photographs. They are common and natural experiences but may also be unsettling and elicit powerful surges of grief. Provide time and support to help the person talk about these experiences. Offer support for future events and holidays.

Remember grief is unique: no one responds to a death in the same way. There are no rules or prescribed time frames for the grieving person to attain. While it is possible to share parts of your experiences, be patient and allow the grieving person to proceed at their own pace.

Connect: make contact, write a note, share favourite memories of the person who died, pay tribute, or express your care and concern.

Grief is a process: grief is processed, understood, and integrated through time. There is no 'getting over the person who died' or taking a fast track (speed grieving) through grief. Grief might feel at times like travelling on a 'bumpy road' rather than moving forward on an upward trajectory. Providing support to a grieving person means bearing witness to their struggles, without rushing them forward.

Major life decisions: may be postponed by the grieving person, where possible. Supporting them may involve encouraging self-care such as eating healthy foods, catching up on sleep, exercise, spiritual care and avoiding alcohol and drugs.

Professional assistance: grieving can take time -months, sometimes years, so don't rush them, but be aware that some people may need professional assistance. Actively encourage assistance if the grieving person:

- ▷ Feels stuck in their grief or it is getting worse through time
- ▷ Feels their relationship with others seems to be affected in negative ways
- ▷ Feels isolated in their grief experience. Lives alone and had few friends/ families with whom to share the loss and gain support
- ▷ Has experiences of severe trauma such as a car accident or suicide
- ▷ Has persistent, distressing memories about the illness or death or other challenging issues that they would like to explore
- ▷ Has children involved in the loss, such as death of an infant or child, or a child's parent.

Remember to remind the grieving person, and anyone else affected by the loss and grief, of the extra support and assistance available through the EAP.

Also remember that during these times it is your intention to show that you care. This will mean the most and will count in whatever you say or do.

If you would like to speak with a mental health professional about grief or loss, you can access your company's Employee Assistance Provider, BSS Psychology. You can make an appointment by calling 1800 30 30 90 or request a call back via the website bsspsych.com.au.



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