



Tips for Being There Through Grief

Grief is a really difficult experience to navigate, for those who are grieving and those looking to support them. Here are some frequent questions we get from individuals looking to support a friend or family member in grief. Our Bereavement Coordinators don't have all of the answers, but we hope these thoughts will help you come up with the answer that feels right for your unique situation and relationship.

"I'M NOT SURE WHAT TO DO TO HELP SOMEONE WHO IS GRIEVING."

Everyone needs something different. There is no tidy list of "things to do to help", so here are some ideas to get things started:

It can be helpful to start by asking if there is something specific your grieving person needs. Be warned, grief is really overwhelming, so they might not know.

If they are not sure what you can do to help, please think of what you would feel comfortable doing. Mowing the lawn? Making a meal? Helping to get other small tasks done? Then offer whatever you have come up with.

"I'M WORRIED THAT THEY ARE NOT MOVING ON."

It's quite common in our society to expect people to "bounce back" from big life shifts, but please know that this is quite different. While humans are resilient, there are many different factors to grief that make it different from other changes life may throw our way. Please know that grief has no timeline and that everyone needs to learn to cope, adjust, and grieve in ways that feel right

for them.

If you are worried about your grieving person, you may want to offer to help them find a therapist, a support group, or just an offer to talk. This shows them that you care, but please be sure that you are not aiming to "fix" their grief. Grief cannot be fixed, it can only be carried.

"WHAT CAN I SAY? I DON'T WANT TO SAY THE WRONG THING."

While there is no "right" thing to say to someone who is grieving, here are some things that might be wise to stay away from:

- **Platitudes** such as "At least they are in a better place." Many grieving people share that they believe the better place for their person to be, is with them.
- **Trying to make meaning** like "Maybe God needed another angel." While this is meant to comfort, this can feel hollow. If meaning is to be made from this experience, let's leave that to the person who is grieving.
- **Asking "How are you?"** We have heard from many people that they don't feel they can answer truthfully because they are afraid



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people don't want to hear their truthful answer that is full of pain and hurt.

Here are some things to try:

- **Give a hug**, if your person likes hugs. Sometimes we don't need to use words.
- **Let them know that you don't know what to say**. Sometimes it can be uncomfortable to not have the answer, but it can let them know that we are here, even though we don't know exactly what to say or do.
- **Just be there**. This can feel uncomfortable at times, but just a gentle presence that is not trying to "fix" anything can be a blessing.

"I JUST WANT TO HELP IN SOME WAY. CAN I GIVE ADVICE?"

We know you mean well and hope to offer some comfort, but grieving people often share about the loads of unsolicited advice they receive from well-meaning people in their lives.

While sometimes it can be helpful, our general rule is to stay away from giving advice unless it is asked for. Remember, we all need different outlets to help us cope, and we all process things in different ways.

It might be best to even just come out and ask if they would like some of your thoughts on the matter or if they would just like to do this in their own way.

"THEY CAN'T SEEM TO FIND CLOSURE, IS THAT NORMAL?"

Our society has constructed this idea that there should be a sense of closure after someone dies. Many people feel this should be achieved at a funeral/celebration of life/memorial.

Let's try to shift this thinking to see a memorial, certain anniversaries, etc. as mile markers instead of times for closure. Continuing Bonds Theory helps us see that it can actually be helpful to continue having a bond with someone who has died - knowing that it will just look and feel different now that they are no longer physically present.

This may look like someone wearing ashes in a piece of jewelry, talking to a picture of their person who died, or even continuing traditions to honor that person. These can be healthy and comforting ways to keep a bond that feels precious.

"WHAT DO I DO WHEN THEY START TO CRY?"

This might sound like a silly question at first, but we ask you to sit for a moment and think about how you feel when someone around you is crying: is it uncomfortable? Do you try to sooth them? Do you avoid being there at all costs? We all have different comfort levels and that's okay!



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It can be helpful to check in with yourself first, so you know how you'd like to handle it if you come into this situation.

People have shared with us that sometimes they don't need anyone to say or do anything other than just let them cry. It can be a powerful thing to just be with someone in their moment of hurt without trying to fix it, soothe it, or hurry it along. To know that we are accepted even in moments of vulnerability can be so healing.

For some people they don't want to be touched, while others may appreciate a hug or a gentle hand to let them know you are with them.

"THEY SEEM REALLY FORGETFUL, IS THAT NORMAL OR SOMETHING TO WORRY ABOUT?"

It's always a good idea to get a second opinion from a professional, but it can be helpful to know that grief can cause what is called "grief brain."

Picture something like a dense fog rolling into your brain where it can be hard to concentrate, we may become more forgetful or seem scattered, and may feel other aspects of processing becoming more difficult. This is pretty typical for someone who is grieving and the good news is that it lessens over time.

In the mean time it may be helpful to have extra reminders and helpful outlets to help support their tired brain.

"THE SMALLEST THING CAN UPSET THEM AND IT SEEMS OUT OF THE BLUE."

This is what we call a "grief trigger" and these can happen with what can seem like the strangest reminders. Many times we as supporters may prep ourselves to help someone through a holiday or anniversary, but may not see the small moments of grief bubble up.

Grief triggers can be a smell, the feel of something, an emotion rising up, a place, something that is said - the list goes on. Instead of worrying about knowing all of these triggers, just be present with your person when something comes up.

We can support them by being there, and maybe even asking, "What do you need right now?" This lets them know that we are there to support them in that moment and helps us to see what their grief needs right then.

Grief doesn't have a timeline or a set of rules, and we know that can make it difficult to know how to be as helpful as possible. But if you listen to yourself and the needs of the person you are supporting, you will be able to take these questions on one at a time. You don't have to be perfect, or even know what to do. Just showing up and letting them know you care and you are there, is a huge step in the right direction.