SANE We're people like you.

Strategies for Supporting Someone Through Grief

We are not taught how to support someone through grief and consequently, it can feel hard to know what to say or do. Everyone is different and will need different things while they are grieving.

Acknowledging grief

It can be hard to know the right thing to say to someone who has experienced loss. There is a temptation to 'leave them to it' or 'respect their space' instead of trying to find the right words. The truth is, there are no 'right words'; everyone is different, and often words fail to capture the depths of grief. What matters most is not that you say 'the right words' but that you try your best to connect.

Things you could say:

- I'm so sorry for your loss
- I am struggling to find the words to say. I just want you to know I am here for you
- You've been on my mind. How are you feeling today?
- I'm here for you.
- Things to avoid saying (unless the griever says that is how they feel)
- They are in a better place now
- Everything happens for a reason
- You've got this – stay strong
- At least ...

Don't try to fix it

When someone is grieving, we often want desperately to help them feel better. We try to do this by offering solutions or putting a positive spin on their loss. We say things like ' at least they had a long life' or 'everything happens for a reason'. Despite our good intentions, what often happens is that we make as though they are not allowed to grieve, and we push them away.

It seems counterintuitive, but what helps a griever is allowing them to grieve and witnessing their pain.

You can do this:

- By sitting with them, and allowing silence
- By listening to hear, instead of listening to respond
- By saying things like "that sounds really hard" or "I can see how much they meant to you"
- By keeping the conversation about them, and avoiding offering solutions or opinions

Everyone grieves differently

There is no wrong or right way to grieve. During grief, people can experience anger, guilt, shame, joy, anxiety, remorse, shock, jealousy, yearning or confusion. Try not to judge how someone expresses their grief. You can learn more about grief here.

Offer a menu of support options

Everyone will have different needs in grief. Instead of saying 'let me know if you need anything', try offering a few options for them to choose from:

- Would you like to go for a walk this week?
- Can I come over and help you clean your space?
- Would some frozen meals be helpful?
- Do you want to just hang out and watch a movie?
- Is there anything you are avoiding that I could support you with?

Keep checking in

People often stop checking in a month or two after a loss. For some grievers, this can be the hardest time – when life has seemingly returned to 'normal', and their life feels anything but.

- Keep checking in without putting pressure on them to respond
- Try asking them how often you can 'check in' without overwhelming them (this could change with time)
- You could put important anniversaries and events in your calendar and reach out on those days to let them know you are thinking of them.
- When you are also grieving
- It's okay to put your needs first; if you don't have the capacity to support right now, you can communicate that
- We all need to lean on each other during tough times, don't be afraid to ask for help, and lean on your supports
- If you are grieving the same loss, the understanding you share can sometimes be enough to provide comfort and care – don't underestimate the power of just being together.

When grief doesn't ease

If you find that your grief remains persistent, overwhelming and debilitating, and is preventing you from living your life in the way you would like, it can be helpful to seek specialist grief support. You can start by speaking to your GP or exploring the supports listed below.

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SUPPORT

- Grief and loss support can be accessed through SANE's RecoveryClub. To join RecoveryClub, register through the SANE website.
- The grief and loss space on the SANE forums gives another safe opportunity to share, remember and find support with others navigating loss.
- Speak to your GP about accessing your local grief or bereavement service.

National Association for Loss and Grief

Access up to 12 free grief support sessions with a trained volunteer.

1300 474 33

Red Nose

Free support for anyone grieving the sudden loss of a child or young person.

1300 308 307

Suicide Bereavement

StandBy

Free grief support for those bereaved by suicide.

1300 727 247

Thirrili

Free grief support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders bereaved by suicide.

1800 805 801

SANE resources:

- Understanding Grief & Finding What Helps
- Supporting a Child or Young Person Through Grief

Other resources:

- Free e-book: 'How to support a grieving friend' – Griefline
- Video: 'How to Help a Grieving Friend' by Megan Devine