



Tips for Supporting Grieving Individuals

We know it can be difficult to know what to do and say after someone has experienced the death of an important person in their lives. The following tips for supporting grieving individuals are created by our community members who are going through grief themselves.

We hope you take these words of wisdom and shape them into a genuine and sincere expression of your support for the people in your life. Under each tip is a bit more information provided by our Bereavement Coordinators to give some more context to the helpful tip.

“There are times we feel paralyzed in grief. We don’t feel like we can reach out. Please reach out to me and help me move through my paralysis. Remember it’s ok if I say no because I’m not ready.”

Grief is a holistic human experience, meaning that it can affect our mind, body, and soul. Many people don’t realize that grief can be felt so physically, but there are times throughout grief where the body can be affected through feelings of paralysis, lethargy, and other swings that may affect an individual’s ability to function at the level they may be accustomed to.

“In grief, I can feel as though I’m not able to physically do some things. There are other times when I might just be irritated that I have to do things that feel meaningless, but are part of life. For a while, I may not feel like myself, no matter what people say and how they try to help.”

After a major loss has occurred in life, we may feel a shift in our thinking and our priorities. So while our body may be responding in grief as mentioned above, there can also be times when we feel other life tasks as tedious or meaningless. It can be helpful to have someone with us to help with these daunting tasks.

“There is no timeline for my grief. It takes a long time to feel and do what might be seen as typical life tasks.”

Society has this idea that we can grieve for a few months or even up to a year, and then we should be “functioning like normal.” Grief turns our lives upside down and pieces of it will stay with us forever. There is no magical timeline when someone will “be over” or “be done” with grief. Allowing someone to find their way through the grief journey is a gift. Help them learn how to build their lives up again, in whatever way they feel is right for them. Just being there and letting them show up however they are that day is sometimes the kindest and most compassionate thing we can do for someone we care about.



Tips for Supporting Grieving Individuals

"Please be honest when you are reaching out. I know it may be hard to think of what to say, but platitudes don't help."

Comments such as, "At least they are in a better place." Or "You should be grateful they are no longer in pain." Are usually meant well, but are not comforting for a grieving heart. We have heard people say that sometimes all they need is for someone to just say, "I'm sorry. I love you." or maybe to just show up and have their presence show they care, or even just a hug to say what we can never quite put into words. It's also ok to say, "I don't even know what to say right now, _____." Ended with a heartfelt statement.

"Reach out often. It helps me see that you are not just "doing the right thing" by saying you will be there, but that you actually mean it."

We often see that support from family and friends will drop off around the three month mark, but the individual's grief does not. When someone is only three or so months into their grief, things can still seem so fresh and raw, so they may not be able to or want to reach out to you. Many griever feel like a burden to those around them. Follow up on what you said you would do. While people want to be there for their grieving person, they may offer to help if it's needed. Sometimes in grief, we aren't sure what we need. Try offering concrete tasks you can help with and know you will be able to follow through with.

"It's okay to check in on me and my grief, but please don't feel the need to comfort me when I express myself."

It is a myth that we need to "fix" something for a person who is upset. We are all hardwired with a full range of human emotions! While it may not always be comfortable to feel them all, or even see others feel them, it can be invaluable to just allow someone to express what they are really feeling and just be there with them in that. Unfortunately, grief cannot be fixed, but we can sit alongside someone and help them carry the heaviness of grief.

"Please know that I have a very low tolerance for insincerity right now. I am met with many unhelpful phrases in my grief."

Emotions can run high in grief. Many griever are met with so many big expectations of themselves and a society that doesn't really understand or appreciate how tough of a journey grief is. This leads to people making insincere comments that can really hurt a grieving person. Please don't worry about saying "the right thing" and just speak from your heart. This person is more than their grief - speak to them as the whole person you know and love.



Tips for Supporting Grieving Individuals

"When you are asking if you can help or if you would like to get together - be specific. Ask me when or give me some times. I may not feel comfortable reaching back out when I am looking to get together. Giving a general statement makes the offer feel less genuine."

Your general statement of, "I'd love to get together soon." May have the wonderful intention of not pushing the grieving person too much, but the flipside of that is that their worlds have just been turned upside down and grief brain (a general fogginess) can keep them from feeling up to making a social calendar - even if they would love the company. Have a conversation about this, come up with some dates, and listen to what they need. Invite them to let you know if they aren't ready yet, and keep checking in.

"Please don't think and say that you understand what I am going through."

In many situations, humans use stories to connect and offer sympathy and empathy. Many griever are met with stories from others about the grief they have experienced. While this is meant to show connection, it can actually feel rather overwhelming and disconnecting. When in deep grief, a griever's emotional bandwidth for other's stories may not be very high. Try focusing on that person's story instead of bringing your own losses in right away. It may be more appropriate to add your stories down the road, but right now, they may just need their loss acknowledged.

"If you have asked me to an event, the most helpful thing you can do is follow up with me, and even plan all of the details and just check to make sure it all works."

Grief brain - the general fogginess mentioned before may effect the individual's ability to make decisions, plan out details, and put small things in place. It can be helpful to ask specific questions to help plan things out, ensuring it will feel comfortable for them, and then maybe even help them get to the event so they don't have to worry about it. There is so much burdening a grieving mind, it can be nice for them to feel supported in life events.



Tips for Supporting Grieving Individuals

“Don’t be afraid to talk about my person. ”

We always ask that you check in with your grieving person first, to see if they would like to talk about their person or if they are wanting a grief break. Many times, people will no longer talk about someone who has died, or even say their name, so it can be wonderful to be able to have these conversations. Some individuals have shared that they feel that now their person has died, people act like they never existed and avoid speaking of them at all costs. This can be so hurtful as they are missing their person every second. Share stories, say their name, don't forget that the person who died was more than their illness or cause of death - help your grieving person to continue honoring and celebrating their person's life!

“There are times I might need you to care for me by being direct and letting me know that you are going to help with something, and even giving me permission not to help.”

As mentioned previously, many grievors feel as though they are a burden to others. They may need more assistance in different seasons of their grief journey, but know that others have their own lives to attend to. Take time to really listen to your grieving person, do they not want help or are they using language that makes them seem as though they are not wanting to burden you? If you have a close bond, maybe it's time to confidently take the reins and let them know that you'll be there to help no matter what! You may even give them permission to step back and rest or do something to take care of themselves.

Special note: Please be mindful of what activities you just take over. Someone may not be ready for a grief task such as donating items or clothing - please don't push them. Other times they may need the yard mowed, driveway shoveled, or other non-grief tasks that you may be able to just take on for them.

Please know that these tips are meant to be a guide to help you think through supporting a grieving individual in your life. Keep in mind that we are all individuals and we have a very unique grief experience, so these things may not apply to all people. We are also unique as supporters, so we will have different styles and comfort levels - that's okay!

Since our society doesn't do a great job of teaching us about grief or how to support those who are grieving, we hope these will give you a foundation to be more thoughtful in your reactions and responses to a grieving person in your life.

The most important piece of mindful interaction we can give to you is to have a conversation with the person you are looking to support. Talk through things and really tailor things to that individual, what you can do, and what your relationship is built on.