

## Offer practical help

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### **In the days after the death has occurred**

- help with answering the phone,
- make lists of what needs to be done,
- bring a meal,
- do errands and shopping,
- take care of the children,
- be a chauffeur to appointments.

### **In the months following the death**

- bring and share a meal,
- spend time to listen,
- help with garden chores or household maintenance,
- offer some holiday baking,
- share a regular walk or outing,
- offer expertise you may have,
- remember anniversaries, birthdays and special holidays.

### **When the bereaved person is ready**

- help build a bridge to the future,
- include them in social gatherings with new people,
- accompany them to new activities,
- encourage their growing independence,
- welcome their new friends in your social circle,
- continue to remember the person who died and talk about them.

# Things to Remember When Supporting a Grieving Person

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 **Powell River**  
Division of Family Practice  
A GPSC initiative

 **SharedCare**  
Partners for Patients

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## Be genuine by being yourself

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Your connection with the bereaved person should be a continuation of your usual relationship with them. If you are a close friend, they will want and expect caring contact from you. A bereaved person will not want anyone to assume an unfamiliar intimacy now. Your sensitivity and dependability can make a difference to how understood and supported they feel.

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

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Send a sympathy 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 bereaved person. Simply say that you are sorry to hear of the death, mention the person by name, be willing to listen to what the bereaved person may say. Ask how you can be helpful, offer some assistance in a way that feels comfortable for you.

## Get good information about grief so that you understand the normal responses and phases of grief

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

## Be willing to open the subject and to mention the name of the person who died

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Rather than filling conversation with other topics, let the bereaved person talk with you about the death and their feelings. If there are silences, let these be shared moments of quiet without rushing into the gap.

## Listen to the bereaved person

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Allowing them to talk and to 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

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The death of someone important is painful. Trying to 'cheer up' a bereaved person denies the significance and depth of their grief. You can help by allowing the expression of feelings – guilt, sorrow, anger, sadness – without judgement. These feelings are healthy and normal aspects of grief.

## Reach out to offer support

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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

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Mourning takes lots of time and grief never entirely goes away. The bereaved person will have ups and downs as they move through their grief. Be flexible in how you offer support as the needs of the bereaved person will change with the grief process.

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

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How a person grieves is a result of their personality, their past history of loss and the relationship that they had with the person who died. Accept the bereaved person's evaluation of the significance of the loss and the depth of their feelings.

## Remember that there is no right way to grieve

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Avoid criticizing how someone is grieving; you cannot know what is best for them. Most often a person's strengths, coping mechanisms and network of family, friends and acquaintances are sufficient to sustain them through their grief. However, if you are concerned, encourage them to take care of themselves by getting help also from their minister, doctor, or a counsellor.

## Expect that your own grief may be triggered.

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These feelings may be related to this loss or to a loss that happened in your own past. You may want to share things that have been helpful to you when you were grieving. Be sensitive in how and when you share suggestions or your own feelings. Ask yourself: Will this feel helpful to them now?