

TIP SHEET: HOW TO SUPPORT A PERSON WHO IS GRIEVING THE LOSS OF A LIFE

When a person loses someone, it can be difficult to know how to respond, let alone how to help them. There is no simple solution for bereavement and grief. While you are not able to take away another person's pain, there are ways to offer comfort. Grief is different for every person — some say that is as unique a human fingerprint, and there is no correct way to grieve. These tips can help you to offer support while respecting a person's grieving process.

Start with the Basics

- ◆ Reach out
- ◆ Ask how they are feeling and managing life in light of the loss
- ◆ Provide personalized condolences and avoid simplistic sayings like, "I'm sorry for your loss."

Offer Assistance

- ◆ Gestures like cooking, cleaning or childcare
- ◆ Help with funeral or memorial arrangements

Be an Active Listener

- ◆ Call when you can
- ◆ Ask open-ended questions, not yes or no questions, including about rituals or beliefs related to death
- ◆ Be willing to sit in silence
- ◆ Offer continuous support

WARNING SIGNS A PERSON MIGHT NEED ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

During bereavement, individuals commonly have shifts in feelings and behaviors, especially soon after learning about the loss. However, a prolonged and/or extreme period of change or inability to function may warrant additional support. These shifts can include but are not limited to:



- ◆ Depression: sadness and/or no ability to find joy, extreme fatigue, suicidal thoughts and/or behaviors
- ◆ Dramatic changes in habits: oversleeping or not sleeping at all, eating too little or too much, or extreme isolation
- ◆ Potentially harmful coping: new or worsening substance use, recklessness, or aggression
- ◆ Dangerous or significant decline in physical health: new or worsening health problems such as high blood pressure and/or severe physical sensations such as pain

HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH A PERSON WHO IS GRIEVING

- ◆ Let them guide the conversation
- ◆ Be compassionate and understanding
- ◆ Listen more than talk
- ◆ Don't give advice they didn't ask for
- ◆ Use the name of the person who died in conversation
- ◆ Focus on their needs over your own
- ◆ Take time to learn about their personal death and bereavement-related religious, spiritual, or other beliefs and practices
- ◆ Learn how you might be supportive of their personal beliefs and practices as they desire

WHAT NOT TO SAY TO A PERSON WHO IS GRIEVING

- ◆ “You’ll get over it soon.”
- ◆ “This will pass.”
- ◆ “They would want you to ... [advice].”
- ◆ “He/she/they lived a good life.”
- ◆ “He/she/they are no longer in pain.”
- ◆ “Eventually you will move on.”
- ◆ “You’re so strong.”



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ◆ The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline offers 24/7 judgment-free support for mental health, substance use, and more. Call or text 988 or chat 988lifeline.org.
- ◆ To learn how to get support for mental health, drug, and alcohol issues, visit FindSupport.gov.
- ◆ To locate treatment facilities or providers, visit FindTreatment.gov or call SAMHSA's National Helpline at 800-662-HELP (4357).