

BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT

Suggestions in Communicating with those who Grieve

Develop confidence in talking about death and grief and stay with the conversation. A common experience of grieving people is avoidance behaviors of others – space not given to talk about what happened, what’s happening now or asking questions about how they are managing the changes in life after a death.

We keep conversation going by responding with empathy NOT cliché, solution finding or giving advice. Don’t try to fix or take away grief, rather allow it to be aired, explored, and explained. Sit with the discomfort.

Truly hear the person and the “meaning finding/making” from their grief. Hear their private personal meanings. When someone realises they have been heard they will open up their world more and more to you. They will weep for joy in gratitude that someone has heard them and knows what’s going on for them.

WHAT TO SAY	WHAT NOT TO SAY
I’m sorry	I understand how you feel
What would help you?	Time heals
What would <i>not</i> help you?	Death was a blessing
I’m here and I have time to listen	It all happened for the best
How are things going now?	Be strong! Don’t get upset
What is the hardest part for you?	You should be feeling better by now
You will get through this.	It is God’s will

IMPORTANT: Ask: how, what, where, who, when?. Never ask the question WHY?

Open Ended Questions:	Reflective Phrases:
What does that feel like?	Sounds like...
Can you tell me more about...?	Seems as if...
How are you feeling right now?	I hear you saying...
Would you like to talk about...?	I wonder if...
Where would you like to begin?	I get a sense that...
How do you feel now about...?	I imagine...
How would you like things to be?	I think I hear...
What or about whom have you thought?	What I seem to be hearing...
How do you see things changing?	I get the feeling...
I’m wondering...?	It feels as though...
What is most important for you now?	Sounds to me like...
What is that like?	Am I right in thinking that...?
Can you tell me what that means to you?	You seem to be...
What do you imagine...?	So you are feeling...
How is this... for you?	So it’s...
What memories are most special?	Did I hear you say...?
Can you give me some examples?	So at first you...
Tell me more about...	People seem to be...
Can you explain that a little?	You seem to wish that...

Empathic listening is difficult. For most of us, the temptation to insert our own ideas and stories into the conversation is fierce. We have to silence our egos repeatedly. We can gently open the door to conversation which allows the bereaved person to find resilience, meaning and continued bonds with those who have died.

*Life is
changed not
ended*



*After a death occurs,
there are no perfect
words. Perhaps the
most loving response is
a willingness to linger
with our bereaved
friend beside their loss.
“There is a time simply
to be present to death
– whether one’s own or
that of others –
without any felt
urgencies about doing
something about it or
getting over it”*

Anon

*Death does not
end our
story...
Death does not
end our
relationships*