



Children's
Bereavement +
Center



Lift From Loss

Empathetic Grief Support

When someone you care about is grieving after the loss of a loved one, it can be hard to understand how to best console them. It is common for a grieving person to experience intense and sometimes conflicting emotions, such as sadness, anger, guilt, isolation, relief, and shame, for example. You may be afraid to say the wrong thing, intrude on their personal space, or make them feel even worse after their loss. Having a strong support system and bonds within the community are critical to helping people find hope after experiencing a loss. Although you cannot and should not stop their grief journey, you can be present for them and offer support as they navigate through this challenging time. By learning how to lend support, you are creating a safe place that can help your family and friends know they are not alone while they are grieving. Here are some tips on how you can help those you love after a loss:

Do not be afraid to reach out. It is very important to not allow your own fears about saying or doing something wrong, prevent you from reaching out. Tell your family and loved ones that you are thinking of them. Even small gestures can be an essential source of comfort to a grieving person. For example, you can send a card, a prepared meal, flowers, express your concern, or make yourself available to listen and be supportive. Remember, your family and loved ones may need you even more after the first few weeks and months of their loss, when others may stop calling. Provide ongoing support by checking in now and then through the year after the loss and beyond, as many griever find it challenging to take the initiative to reach out.

Be empathic with your language. Refrain yourself from forcing the grieving individual to open up or use language that can be perceived as insensitive or minimizing their grief. For example, try to avoid phrases such as, "How are you?" as this would be the same greeting you would offer anyone and does not acknowledge the grieving person's pain. Instead, you can try, "How are you feeling today?" or "Do you feel like talking?" Also, refrain from using phrases such as, "He is in a better place now." or "It's time to get on with your life," as that can be hurtful.

More listening, less advising. Sometimes the best support you can offer to a grieving person is the act of listening. Often, people work through the grief process by telling their stories over and over. Assure them that it is okay to talk about their feelings, and that you are there to listen and comfort them. Avoid advising what the grieving person should or should not do unless you were asked to do so. Instead, let the person know that you recognize their loss by saying, "This must be a difficult time for you." or "I cannot imagine how painful this must be for you and your family." It is your understanding, not your advice, that is the most comforting.



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CONTACT TO REGISTER

Be non-judgmental. Be respectful and non-judgmental towards your loved ones' unique grieving process. Grief does not unfold in orderly and predictable stages. Instead, it can be an oscillating process with unpredictable highs, lows, and setbacks. You may wish your loved one would move forward, but you cannot and should not speed up the process for them. Everyone grieves differently for each unique loss, and your ability to accept your loved ones' process of grieving and let them heal at a pace that feels right in their own manner, they will feel more supported.

Provide practical help. Asking a grieving person if you can “do anything” can transfer the burden to them, as they may be too overwhelmed or reluctant to make a request. It is often helpful to offer specific and practical help, like delivering a meal, passing on information about funeral arrangements, answering the phone, or helping with laundry and shopping. You could say, “I’m going to the grocery this afternoon. What can I bring you from there?” or “I’ve made pasta for dinner. When can I come by and bring you some?” Try to be consistent with your offers of assistance, so that the grieving person does not need to make the additional effort of asking repeatedly.

Be culturally sensitive. Beliefs, rituals, and customs associated with grief vary greatly by culture. For example, in some cultures, people believe that the spirit of someone who has died, directly influences the living family members. They may find great comfort in believing that their loved one is watching over them. When you offer support to a grieving person, be sensitive to how grief is expressed in their culture; for example, what rituals are performed after death and how are the deceased honored in their culture. Supporting someone you care about in a culturally sensitive way, can provide a sense of normalcy and community that can help buffer the sense of chaos and confusion created by their loss.

The Children's Bereavement Center “CBC” is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization providing FREE grief support groups for all ages (4+). Lift From Loss® is a division of CBC providing support for young adults and adults. For additional resources, visit our website at www.childbereavement.org. To register for our free virtual grief support groups, call us at (888) 988-5438 or e-mail support@childbereavement.org.

