

PATHWAYS CENTER for GRIEF & LOSS

SUPPORTING THE BEREAVED

When someone is bereaved, it can be difficult to know the best way to support them. Knowing what to say is less important than the willingness to be present and listen. Take time to learn about their relationship with the person who died. Consider the following suggestions:

➤ **Initiate conversation and be honest.**

Offer support rather than waiting for them to ask for help. Be honest if you are unsure what to say.

- *“I want to be supportive but I don’t know what to say.”*
- *“Sometimes I want to talk to you about your loss but I’m afraid I’m going to say something that will upset you or make you cry.”*

➤ **Be sincere.**

Many bereaved believe others don’t really want to know how they feel when asked, how are you?”

- *“I haven’t seen you in a little while and I’ve been wondering...**how are you doing?**”*
- *“I’ve been thinking about you – How have you been doing since ___’s death?”*

➤ **Listen intently.**

Listening is the best way to support someone.

- Be aware of your body language.
- Nod your head or gesture to show your interest.
- Summarize what you hear. *“So, you’re saying you feel ____.”*

➤ **Be respectful and empathetic.**

Rather than giving advice, try to understand what they are feeling and experiencing.

- Try to be comfortable with silence.
- Stay focused on what they are saying. This is not the time for you to talk about your loss experience.
- Acknowledge how difficult grieving can be. *“This sounds very painful for you.”*

➤ **Help with practical tasks.**

Assistance with day-to-day tasks can be helpful soon after the death when a person is overwhelmed with legal issues and details. These can include:

- Cleaning or household chores
- Transportation or childcare
- Finances

➤ **Remember the deceased.**

The bereaved do not want to forget their loved ones and want others to remember them as well.

- Bring up the name of the person who died
- Encourage them to reminisce
- Look at pictures. *“I’d love to see some pictures of _____. How would you feel about that?”*

➤ **Continue your support.**

Mourning is an ongoing process with no specific end point.

- People don’t get over their loss. In time they learn to live with their loss.
- Continue to check-in. *“What is difficult for you now?”*
- Be sensitive to significant dates – anniversaries, holidays, birthdays.

➤ **Provide resource information.**

Remind the bereaved of the different support options that are available to them.

- Support groups
- Bereavement counselors or individual therapists
- Chaplains or church ministers

Being a support to someone who is grieving is hard work. You cannot give the bereaved what they really want, which is to have their loved one back. This can leave you feeling helpless, wishing you could do more for them. Remember what is most important is that you show that you care and are there for them. You don’t have to have all the answers; you just need to be willing to listen.

Keep in mind Hospice & Community Care Pathways Center for Grief & Loss is an additional option for support for both yourself and the person you care about. We have a lending library of resources that may be of interest to you. Additionally, there are a variety of support groups to choose from; a bimonthly bereavement newsletter or individual consultations are available. Call for more information, (717) 391-2413 or (800) 924-7610.