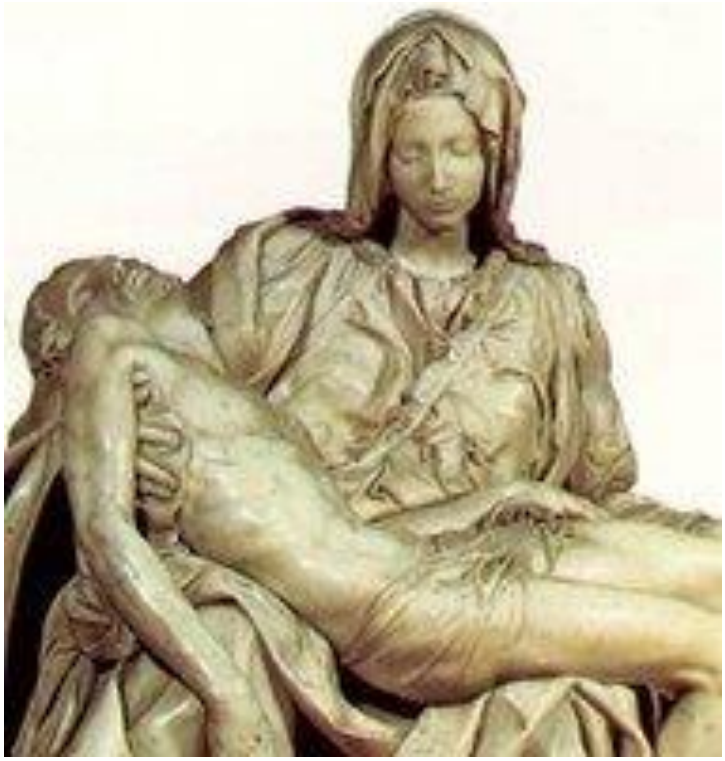
# Grief Overview

## “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.”

**John 10:10**



**Pieta (1500) St Peter's Rome**

**Archdiocese of Boston**
**Office of Chaplaincy Programs**
**Healthcare, Campus/University, Prison**
**Parish Outreach to the sick and Homebound**
**Bereavement, Faith Community Nursing**

**617-746-5843**

# Basic Grief information:

Grief is defined as a multi-faceted response to loss, particularly to the loss of someone or something to which a bond was formed. Although conventionally focused on the emotional response to loss, it also has physical, cognitive, behavioral, social, and philosophical dimensions. Common to human experience is the death of a loved one, whether it be a friend, family, or other companion. While the terms are often used interchangeably, bereavement often refers to the state of loss, and grief to the reaction to loss. (From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia)

Grief is a healthy normal human response to a loss. Every person grieves differently.

Examples of a loss that may cause grief:

- Death of a loved one
- Separation or divorce
- Miscarriages
- Injury or disability
- Loss of a job, property, or pet
- Moving to a new place
- A child leaving home

The greatest loss which we experience is the death of a loved one. Grieving is a natural normal way which helps us to accept our loss.

# What can we do to help heal from a loss:

## Emotionally

- Express your feelings aloud
- Ask for help
- Accept help
- Be kind and patient to yourself

## Physically

- Get plenty of rest
- Exercise and eat a healthy diet
- Be alert to persistent problems (weight loss, headaches, difficulty sleeping, lack of energy)
- See your physician if needed

## Psychologically

- Set short term goals
- Try new activities
- Try to regain a positive outlook
- Evaluate your goals

## Sources of help

- Counseling
- Support groups
- Social service organizations
- To find more information check with local hospice, hospitals, faith community

# MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT GRIEF

**MYTH:** The pain will go away faster if you ignore it.

**Fact:** Trying to ignore your pain or keep it from surfacing will only make it worse in the long run. For real healing it is necessary to face your grief and actively deal with it.

**MYTH:** It's important to be "be strong" in the face of loss.

**Fact:** Feeling sad, frightened or lonely is a normal reaction to loss. Crying doesn't mean you are weak. You don't need to "protect" your family or friends by putting on a brave front. Showing your true feelings can help them and you.

**MYTH:** If you don't cry, it means you aren't sorry about the loss.

**Fact:** Crying is a normal response to sadness, but it's not the only one. Those who don't cry may feel the pain just as deeply as others. They may simply have other ways of showing it.

**MYTH:** Grief should last about a year.

**Fact:** There is no right or wrong time frame for grieving. How long it takes can differ from person to person.

**MYTH:** Moving on with your life means you're forgetting the one you lost.

**Fact:** Moving on means you've accepted your loved one's death. That is not the same as forgetting. You can create a new life and still keep your loved one's memory a part of you.

**MYTH:** Friends can help by not bringing up the subject.

**Fact:** People who are grieving usually want and need to talk about their loss. Bringing up the subject can make it easier to talk about.

# Types of Grief

**Anticipatory Grief:**
Experiencing anticipatory grief may provide time for the preparation of loss, acceptance of loss, the ability to finish unfinished business, life review and resolve conflicts

**Normal Grief:**
Normal feelings, reactions and behaviors to a loss; grief reactions can be physical, psychological, cognitive, behavioral

**Complicated Grief:**

> **Chronic Grief:**
> Normal grief reactions that do not subside and continue over very long periods of time
>
> **Delayed Grief:**
> Normal grief reactions that are suppressed or postponed.
> The survivor consciously of unconsciously avoids the pain of the loss.
>
> **Exaggerated Grief:**
> Survivor resorts to self-destructive behaviors such as suicide.
>
> **Masked Grief:**
> Survivor is not aware that behaviors that interfere with normal functioning are a result of the loss.

**Disenfranchised Grief:**
The grief encountered when a loss is experienced and cannot be openly acknowledged, socially sanctioned or publicly shared.

# Are there stages of grief?

In 1969, psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross introduced what became known as the "five stages of grief." These stages of grief were based on her studies of the feelings of patients facing terminal illness, but many people have generalized them to other types of negative life changes and losses, such as the death of a loved one or a break-up.

## The five stages of grief:

- **Denial:** "This can't be happening to me."
- **Anger:** "*Why* is this happening? Who is to blame?"
- **Bargaining:** "Make this not happen, and in return I will ____."
- **Depression:** "I'm too sad to do anything."
- **Acceptance:** "I'm at peace with what happened."

If you are experiencing any of these emotions following a loss, it may help to know that your reaction is natural and that you'll heal in time. However, not everyone who is grieving goes through all of these stages – and that's okay. Contrary to popular belief, **you do not have to go through each stage in order to heal.** In fact, some people resolve their grief without going through *any* of these stages. And if you do go through these stages of grief, you probably won't experience them in a neat, sequential order, so don't worry about what you "should" be feeling or which stage you're supposed to be in.

Kübler-Ross herself never intended for these stages to be a rigid framework that applies to everyone who mourns. In her last book before her death in 2004, she said of the five stages of grief, "They were never meant to help tuck messy emotions into neat packages. They are responses to loss that many people have, but **there is not a typical response to loss, as there is no typical loss.** Our grieving is as individual as our lives."

## Grief is a roller coaster, not a series of stages

It is best not to think of grief as a series of stages. Rather, we might think of the grieving process as a roller coaster, full of ups and downs, highs and lows. Like many roller coasters, the ride tends to be rougher in the beginning; the lows may be deeper and longer. The difficult periods should become less intense and shorter as time goes by, but it takes time to work through a loss. Even years after a loss, especially at special events such as a family wedding or the birth of a child, we may still experience a strong sense of grief.

# Timetables for Grief

One of the most frequently asked question is: "How long will it last?" Everyone grieves differently and so the time table is different for everyone. This is a general description.

**Month one**:
In the first month, grieving persons may be so busy with funeral arrangements, visitors, paperwork and other immediate tasks that they have little time to begin the grieving process. They may also be numb and feel that the loss is unreal. This may last beyond the first month if the death was sudden, violent or particularly untimely.

**Month Three:**
This may be a particularly challenging time for many grieving persons. Visitors have gone home, cards and calls have pretty much stopped and most of the numbness has worn off. Many who do not understand the grief process may pressure the grieving person to get back to normal. The grieving person is just beginning the very painful task of understanding what this loss really means.

**Months four through twelve:**
The grieving person continues to work through the many tasks of learning to live with the loss. There begins to be a more good days than bad days. Difficult periods will crop up sometimes with no obvious trigger, even late into the last half of the first year. It is important that the grieving person understand these difficult periods are normal, not a sign of weakness. They are not a set back or a sign of a lack of progress

**Significant anniversaries:**
During the first year, personal and public holidays present additional challenges. Birthdays (of the deceased and other family members), weddings anniversaries and family and school reunions can be difficult. Medical anniversaries, such as the day of diagnosis, the day someone is hospitalized or came home from the hospital can also bring up memories. The grieving person may not be aware of these dates but they may still affect them.

**The one-year anniversary of the death:**
Reactions to the anniversary may begin days or weeks before the actual date. Many people describe reliving those last difficult days. Even individuals who have been doing well may be surprised at how intensely the one year anniversary affects them. People generally welcome additional acknowledgment or support during anniversaries.

**The second year:**
Most grieving people agree that it takes at least two years to start feeling as if they have established workable new routines and a new identity without the deceased person. Many of the tasks of the second year have to do with re-assessing goals, discovering a new identity and creating a different life style.

# Why does the grieving process last so long?

It is often difficult for the family, friends and colleagues of a loved one to understand why the grieving process lasts so long. They want to see us happy again and getting on with our life. It is important to be aware of the many kinds and levels of loss that can accompany the death of a loved one. This awareness may help us and others who care about us to be more patient and gentle to us and to others during the grieving process.

We will often experience a secondary loss that may not be as obvious as the overwhelming loss of a loved one.

**Loss of a large part of ourselves**: There is always a part of us that was given to our loved one.

**Loss of Identity:** Part of who we are is what we did with and for the other person.

**Loss of Self Confidence:** The feeling of inadequacy, not being able to do anything right, is often a strong feeling after a loss.

**Loss of a chosen lifestyle:** Death forces us to change, to begin a new lifestyle weather we want to or not.

**Loss of security:** When a love one dies we lose the most basic sense of security. We often don't know what will happen next or how to respond to situations.

# Dual Process Model

The Dual Process Model of coping with bereavement was developed by Stroebe and Schut (Stroebe & Schut, 1999, 2010). A Model that states normal grief involves an oscillation between confronting the loss (loss oriented) and compartmentalizing it so the the mourner can attend to the life changes necessitated by the death (restoration orientation). (Handbook of Thanatology 2nd edition 222)

This model departs from the traditional way of thinking that describes mourning as cyclical rather the linear or a stage like process. This model continues the bond with the decease. It allows the mourning person to continue their bonds with the decease and to move on in life without the deceased. They are able to feel and do by reorganizing their relationship with the deceased.

*Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement*

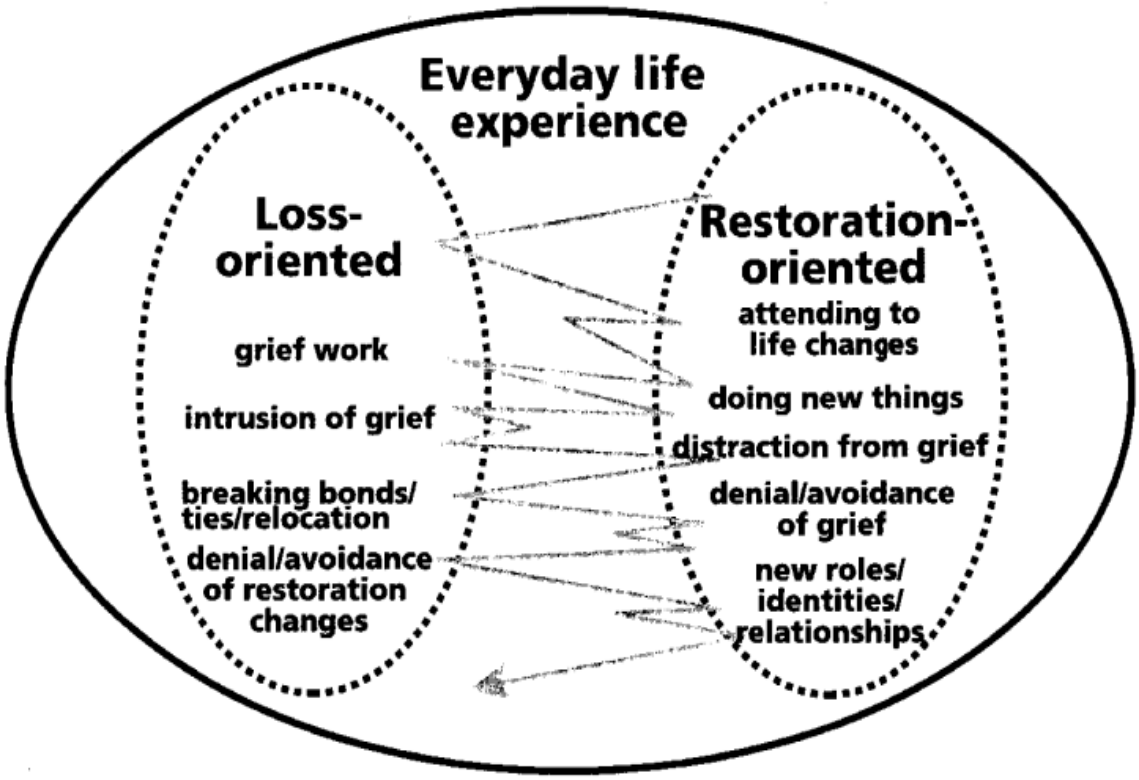



**FIGURE 1** A dual process model of coping with bereavement.
(Stroebe and Schut, 1999,2010)

# Continuing Bonds

"When your loved one dies grief isn't about working through a linear process that ends with 'acceptance' or a 'new life', where you have moved on or compartmentalized your loved one's memory. Rather, when a loved one dies you slowly find ways to adjust and redefine your relationship with that person, allowing for a continued bond with that person that will endure, in different ways and to varying degrees, throughout your life. This relationship is not unhealthy, nor does it mean you are not grieving in a normal way. Instead, the continuing bonds theory suggests that this is not only normal and healthy, but that an important part of grief is continuing ties to loved ones in this way. Rather than assuming detachment as a normal grief response, continuing bonds considers natural human attachment even in death."
(http://www.whatsyourgrief.com/continuing-bonds-shifting-the-grief-paradigm/)

# Resiliency

Fr Terence P. Curley in his new book Challenging the Landscape of Loss states:

"We are resilient beings. The new science highlights our ability to experience resiliency while we grieve. It does not mean that we do not grieve, and it certainly does not minimize grief. Rather it means, as Professor Bonanno puts is, we are "hard wired" to go through grief probably better than we thought.

Resiliency is the more common response to grief. It is the rule not the exception. This flies in the face of a "medical model,' which insists there are "symptoms" of searching, yearning, anger, and possible guilt. It is not necessary to have grief counseling when we do not express these emotions, as the prevailing theory suggested for many years.

Seeking purpose and meaning is the new description of how bereaved go through losses. More appropriate responses may be searching for meaning and finding meaning. When the person who is grieving is appreciated as the one who makes sense of his world, we give significance to the loss. On a deeper level the bereaved are finding highly personal meaning in their experience. This is in keeping with "Sorting things out" while we grieve so we can revise and rebuild our world."

# Common symptoms of grief

While loss affects people in different ways, many people experience the following symptoms when they're grieving. Just remember that almost anything that you experience in the early stages of grief is normal – including feeling like you're going crazy, feeling like you're in a bad dream, or questioning your religious beliefs.

- **Shock and disbelief** – Right after a loss, it can be hard to accept what happened. You may feel numb, have trouble believing that the loss really happened, or even deny the truth. If someone you love has died, you may keep expecting them to show up, even though you know they're gone.
- **Sadness** – Profound sadness is probably the most universally experienced symptom of grief. You may have feelings of emptiness, despair, yearning, or deep loneliness. You may also cry a lot or feel emotionally unstable.
- **Guilt** – You may regret or feel guilty about things you did or didn't say or do. You may also feel guilty about certain feelings (e.g. feeling relieved when the person died after a long, difficult illness). After a death, you may even feel guilty for not doing something to prevent the death, even if there was nothing more you could have done.
- **Anger** – Even if the loss was nobody's fault, you may feel angry and resentful. If you lost a loved one, you may be angry at yourself, God, the doctors, or even the person who died for abandoning you. You may feel the need to blame someone for the injustice that was done to you.
- **Fear** – A significant loss can trigger a host of worries and fears. You may feel anxious, helpless, or insecure. You may even have panic attacks. The death of a loved one can trigger fears about your own mortality, of facing life without that person, or the responsibilities you now face alone.
- **Physical symptoms** – We often think of grief as a strictly emotional process, but grief often involves physical problems, including fatigue, nausea, lowered immunity, weight loss or weight gain, aches and pains, and insomnia.

# Coping with grief and loss: Get support

The single most important factor in healing from loss is having the support of other people. Even if you aren't comfortable talking about your feelings under normal circumstances, it's important to express them when you're grieving. Sharing your loss makes the burden of grief easier to carry. Wherever the support comes from, accept it and **do not grieve alone.** Connecting to others will help you heal.

# Finding support after a loss

- **Turn to friends and family members** – Now is the time to lean on the people who care about you, even if you take pride in being strong and self-sufficient. Draw loved ones close, rather than avoiding them, and accept the assistance that's offered. Oftentimes, people want to help but don't know how, so tell them what you need – whether it's a shoulder to cry on or help with funeral arrangements.

- **Draw comfort from your faith** – If you follow a religious tradition, embrace the comfort its mourning rituals can provide. Spiritual activities that are meaningful to you – such as praying, meditating, or going to church – can offer solace. If you're questioning your faith in the wake of the loss, talk to a clergy member or others in your religious community.

- **Join a support group** – Grief can feel very lonely, even when you have loved ones around. Sharing your sorrow with others who have experienced similar losses can help. To find a bereavement support group in your area, contact local hospitals, hospices, funeral homes, and counseling centers.

- **Talk to a therapist or grief counselor** – If your grief feels like too much to bear, call a mental health professional with experience in grief counseling. An experienced therapist can help you work through intense emotions and overcome obstacles to your grieving.

# Coping with grief and loss: Take care of yourself

When you're grieving, it's more important than ever to take care of yourself. The stress of a major loss can quickly deplete your energy and emotional reserves. Looking after your physical and emotional needs will help you get through this difficult time.

- **Face your feelings.** You can try to suppress your grief, but you can't avoid it forever. In order to heal, you have to acknowledge the pain. Trying to avoid feelings of sadness and loss only prolongs the grieving process. Unresolved grief can also lead to complications such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and health problems.

- **Express your feelings in a tangible or creative way.** Write about your loss in a journal. If you've lost a loved one, write a letter saying the things you never got to say; make a scrapbook or photo album celebrating the person's life; or get involved in a cause or organization that was important to him or her.

- **Look after your physical health**. The mind and body are connected. When you feel good physically, you'll also feel better emotionally. Combat stress and fatigue by getting enough sleep, eating right, and exercising. Don't use alcohol or drugs to numb the pain of grief or lift your mood artificially.

- **Don't let anyone tell you how to feel, and don't tell yourself how to feel either.** Your grief is your own, and no one else can tell you when it's time to "move on" or "get over it." Let yourself feel whatever you feel without embarrassment or judgment. It's okay to be angry, to yell at the heavens, to cry or not to cry. It's also okay to laugh, to find moments of joy, and to let go when you're ready.

- **Plan ahead for grief "triggers".** Anniversaries, holidays, and milestones can reawaken memories and feelings. Be prepared for an emotional wallop, and know that it's completely normal. If you're sharing a holiday or lifecycle event with other relatives, talk to them ahead of time about their expectations and agree on strategies to honor the person you loved.

# When grief doesn’t go away

It’s normal to feel sad, numb, or angry following a loss. But as time passes, these emotions should become less intense as you accept the loss and start to move forward. If you aren’t feeling better over time, or your grief is getting worse, it may be a sign that your grief has developed into a more serious problem, such as complicated grief or major depression.

## Complicated grief

The sadness of losing someone you love never goes away completely, but it shouldn’t remain center stage. If the pain of the loss is so constant and severe that it keeps you from resuming your life, you may be suffering from a condition known as *complicated grief*. Complicated grief is like being stuck in an intense state of mourning. You may have trouble accepting the death long after it has occurred or be so preoccupied with the person who died that it disrupts your daily routine and undermines your other relationships.

Symptoms of complicated grief include:

- Intense longing and yearning for the deceased
- Intrusive thoughts or images of your loved one
- Denial of the death or sense of disbelief
- Imagining that your loved one is alive
- Searching for the person in familiar places
- Avoiding things that remind you of your loved one
- Extreme anger or bitterness over the loss
- Feeling that life is empty or meaningless

## The difference between grief and depression

Distinguishing between grief and clinical depression isn’t always easy, since they share many symptoms. However, there are ways to tell the difference. Remember, grief is a roller coaster. It involves a wide variety of emotions and a mix of good and bad days. Even when you’re in the middle of the grieving process, you will have moments of pleasure or happiness. With depression, on the other hand, the feelings of emptiness and despair are constant.

Other symptoms that suggest depression, not just grief:

- Intense, pervasive sense of guilt.
- Thoughts of suicide or a preoccupation with dying.
- Feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness.
- Slow speech and body movements
- Inability to function at work, home, and/or school.
- Seeing or hearing things that aren’t there.

# Can antidepressants help grief?

As a general rule, normal grief does not warrant the use of antidepressants. While medication may relieve some of the symptoms of grief, it cannot treat the cause, which is the loss itself. Furthermore, by numbing the pain that must be worked through eventually, antidepressants delay the mourning process.

# When to seek professional help for grief

If you recognize any of the above symptoms of complicated grief or clinical depression, talk to a mental health professional right away. Left untreated, complicated grief and depression can lead to significant emotional damage, life-threatening health problems, and even suicide. But treatment can help you get better.

Contact a grief counselor or professional therapist if you:

- Feel like life isn't worth living
- Wish you had died with your loved one
- Blame yourself for the loss or for failing to prevent it
- Feel numb and disconnected from others for more than a few weeks
- Are having difficulty trusting others since your loss
- Are unable to perform your normal daily activities

# Helping Others through Grief, Loss, and Bereavement

It can be tough to know what to say or do when someone you care about is grieving. It's common to feel helpless, awkward, or unsure. You may be afraid of intruding, saying the wrong thing, or making the person feel even worse. Or maybe you feel there's little you can do to make things better.

While you can't take away the pain of the loss, you *can* provide much-needed comfort and support. There are many ways to help a grieving friend or family member, starting with letting the person know you care.

# What you need to know about bereavement and grief

The death of a loved one is one of life's most difficult experiences. The bereaved struggle with many intense and frightening emotions, including depression, anger, and guilt. Often, they feel isolated and alone in their grief. Having someone to lean on can help them through the grieving process.

Don't let discomfort prevent you from reaching out to someone who is grieving. Now, more than ever, your support is needed. You might not know exactly what to say or what to do, but that's okay. You don't need to have answers or give advice. The most important thing you can do for a grieving person is to simply be there. Your support and caring presence will help them cope with the pain and begin to heal.

# Understanding the bereavement process

The better your understanding of grief and how it is healed, the better equipped you'll be to help a bereaved friend or family member:

- **There is no right or wrong way to grieve.** Grief does not unfold in orderly, predictable stages. It is an emotional rollercoaster, with unpredictable highs, lows, and setbacks. Everyone grieves differently, so avoid telling the bereaved what they "should" be feeling or doing.
- **Grief may involve extreme emotions and behaviors.** Feelings of guilt, anger, despair, and fear are common. A grieving person may yell to the heavens, obsess about the death, lash out at loved ones, or cry for hours on end. The bereaved need reassurance that what they're feeling is normal. Don't judge them or take their grief reactions personally.
- **There is no set timetable for grieving.** For many people, recovery after bereavement takes 18 to 24 months, but for others, the grieving process may be longer or shorter. Don't pressure the bereaved to move on or make them feel like they've been grieving too long. This can actually slow their healing.

# What to say to someone who has lost a loved one

It is common to feel awkward when trying to comfort someone who is grieving. Many people do not know what to say or do. The following are suggestions to use as a guide.

- Acknowledge the situation. Example: "I heard that your_____ died." Use the word "died" That will show that you are more open to talk about how the person really feels.
- Express your concern. Example: "I'm sorry to hear that this happened to you."
- Be genuine in your communication and don't hide your feelings. Example: "I'm not sure what to say, but I want you to know I care."
- Offer your support. Example: "Tell me what I can do for you."
- Ask how he or she feels, and don't assume you know how the bereaved person feels on any given day.

# Helping a grieving person: Listen with compassion

Almost everyone worries about what to say to people who are grieving. But knowing how to listen is much more important. Oftentimes, well-meaning people avoid talking about the death or mentioning the deceased person. However, the bereaved need to feel that their loss is acknowledged, it's not too terrible to talk about, and their loved one won't be forgotten.

While you should never try to force someone to open up, it's important to let the bereaved know they have permission to talk about the loss. Talk candidly about the person who died and don't steer away from the subject if the deceased's name comes up. When it seems appropriate, ask sensitive questions – without being nosy – and then invite the grieving person to openly express his or her feelings. Try simply asking, "Do you feel like talking?"

- **Accept and acknowledge all feelings.** Let the grieving person know that it's okay to cry in front of you, to get angry, or to break down. Don't try to reason with them over how they should or shouldn't feel. The bereaved should feel free to express their feelings, without fear of judgment, argument, or criticism.
- **Be willing to sit in silence.** Don't press if the grieving person doesn't feel like talking. You can offer comfort and support with your silent presence. If you can't think of something to say, just offer eye contact, a squeeze of the hand, or a reassuring hug.
- **Let the bereaved talk about how their loved one died.** People who are grieving may need to tell the story over and over again, sometimes in minute detail. Be patient. Repeating the story is a way of processing and accepting the death. With each retelling, the pain lessens.
- **Offer comfort and reassurance without minimizing the loss**. Tell the bereaved that what they're feeling is okay. If you've gone through a similar loss, share your own experience if you think it would help. However, don't give unsolicited advice, claim to "know" what the person is feeling, or compare your grief to theirs.

# Comments to avoid when comforting the bereaved

- **"I know how you feel."** One can never know how another may feel. You could, instead, ask your friend to tell you how he or she feels.

- **"It's part of God's plan."** This phrase can make people angry and they often respond with, "What plan? Nobody told me about any plan."

- **"Look at what you have to be thankful for."** They know they have things to be thankful for, but right now they are not important.

- **"He's in a better place now."** The bereaved may or may not believe this. Keep your beliefs to yourself unless asked.

- **"This is behind you now; it's time to get on with your life."** Sometimes the bereaved are resistant to getting on with because they feel this means "forgetting" their loved one. In addition, moving on is easier said than done. Grief has a mind of its own and works at its own pace.

- **Statements that begin with "You should" or "You will."** These statements are too directive. Instead you could begin your comments with: "Have you thought about. . ." or "You might. . ."

# Helping a grieving person: Offer practical assistance

It is difficult for many grieving people to ask for help. They might feel guilty about receiving so much attention, fear being a burden, or be too depressed to reach out. You can make it easier for them by making specific suggestions – such as, "I'm going to the market this afternoon. What can I bring you from there?" or "I've made beef stew for dinner. When can I come by and bring you some?"

Consistency is very helpful, if you can manage it – being there for as long as it takes. This helps the grieving person look forward to your attentiveness without having to make the additional effort of asking again and again. You can also convey an open invitation by saying, "Let me know what I can do," which may make a grieving person feel more comfortable about asking for help. But keep in mind that the bereaved may not have the energy or motivation to call you when they need something, so it's better if you take the initiative to check in.

# Be the one who takes the initiative

There are many practical ways you can help a grieving person. You can offer to:

- Shop for groceries or run errands
- Drop off a casserole or other type of food
- Help with funeral arrangements
- Stay in their home to take phone calls and receive guests
- Help with insurance forms or bills
- Take care of housework, such as cleaning or laundry
- Watch their children or pick them up from school
- Drive them wherever they need to go
- Look after their pets
- Go with them to a support group meeting
- Accompany them on a walk
- Take them to lunch or a movie
- Share an enjoyable activity (game, puzzle, art project)

# Helping a grieving person: Provide ongoing support

Grieving continues long after the funeral is over and the cards and flowers have stopped. The length of the grieving process varies from person to person. But in general, grief lasts much longer than most people expect. Your bereaved friend or family member may need your support for months or even years.

- **Continue your support over the long haul**. Stay in touch with the grieving person, periodically checking in, dropping by, or sending letters or cards. Your support is more valuable than ever once the funeral is over, the other mourners are gone, and the initial shock of the loss has worn off.

- **Don't make assumptions based on outward appearances**. The bereaved person may look fine on the outside, while inside he or she is suffering. Avoid saying things like "You are so strong" or "You look so well." This puts pressure on the person to keep up appearances and to hide his or her true feelings.

- **The pain of bereavement may never fully heal.** Be sensitive to the fact that life may never feel the same. You don't "get over" the death of a loved one. The bereaved person may learn to accept the loss. The pain may lessen in intensity over time. But the sadness may never completely go away.

- **Offer extra support on special days**. Certain times and days of the year will be particularly hard for your grieving friend or family member. Holidays, family milestones, birthdays, and anniversaries often reawaken grief. Be sensitive on these occasions. Let the bereaved person know that you're there for whatever he or she needs.

# Helping a grieving person: Watch for warning signs

It's common for a grieving person to feel depressed, confused, disconnected from others, or like they're going crazy. But if the bereaved person's symptoms don't gradually start to fade – or they get worse with time – this may be a sign that normal grief has evolved into a more serious problem, such as clinical depression.

Encourage the grieving person to seek professional help if you observe any of the following warning signs after the initial grieving period – especially if it's been over two months since the death.

- Difficulty functioning in daily life
- Extreme focus on the death
- Excessive bitterness, anger, or guilt
- Neglecting personal hygiene
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Inability to enjoy life
- Hallucinations
- Withdrawing from others
- Constant feelings of hopelessness
- Talking about dying or suicide

It can be tricky to bring up your concerns to the bereaved person. You don't want to perceived as invasive. Instead of telling the person what to do, try stating your own feelings: "*I am troubled by the fact that you aren't sleeping – perhaps you should look into getting help.*"

# Take talk of suicide very seriously

If a grieving friend or family member talks about suicide, get professional help right away. IN A LIFE-THREATENING EMERGENCY, CALL 911.

# Supporting a child through grief and bereavement

Even very young children feel the pain of bereavement, but they learn how to express their grief by watching the adults around them. After a loss – particularly of a sibling or parent – children need support, stability, and honesty. They may also need extra reassurance that they will be cared for and kept safe. As an adult, you can support children through the grieving process by demonstrating that it's okay to be sad and helping them make sense of the loss.

Answer any questions the child may have as truthfully as you can. Use very simple, honest, and concrete terms when explaining death to a child. Children, especially young children, may blame themselves for what happened and the truth helps them see they are not at fault.

Open communication will smooth the way for a child to express distressing feelings. Because children often express themselves through stories, games and artwork, encourage this self-expression, and look for clues in those activities about how they are coping.

# How to help a grieving child:

- Allow your child, however young, to attend the funeral if he or she wants to.
- Convey your spiritual values about life and death, or pray with your child.
- Meet regularly as a family to find out how everyone is coping.
- Help children find ways to symbolize and memorialize the deceased person.
- Keep your child's daily routine as normal as possible.
- Pay attention to the way a child plays; this can be one of a child's primary ways of communicating.

# What not to do:

- Don't force a child to publicly mourn if he or she doesn't want to.
- Don't give false or confusing messages, like "Grandma is sleeping now."
- Don't tell a child to stop crying because others might get upset.
- Don't try to shield a child from the loss. Children pick up on much more than adults realize. Including them in the grieving process will help them adapt and heal.
- Don't stifle your tears; By crying in front of your child, you send the message that it's okay for him or her to express feelings, too.
- Don't turn your child into your personal confidante. Rely on another adult or a support group instead.