

HOW TO SUPPORT GRIEVING PEOPLE



BALLARAT
HOSPICE
CARE INC.

Home Based Palliative Care

Listen with compassion to a bereaved person

Your help and understanding can make a significant difference in helping the grieving process. A grieving person needs people who are willing to sit with them in their pain, to listen and to care. The most important help you can offer is a willing ear. Allow the bereaved person to talk and express their grief in whatever way they need. This may include crying, angry outbursts, screaming, laughing, expressions of guilt or regret, or engaging in activities that reduce their stress, such as walking or gardening.

Some things to consider:

- Concentrate your efforts on listening carefully and with compassion. Be a good listener.
- Everyone's experience of grief is unique, so let them grieve their own way. Don't judge or dispute their responses to the death of their loved one. Criticising the way they express their grief is hurtful and may make them less likely to share their thoughts and feelings with you.
- If they don't feel like talking, don't push them. Remember that you are comforting them just by being there and sitting together in silence is helpful too.
- Don't forget the power of human touch. Holding the person's hand or giving them a hug can be helpful, but make sure you check that it's okay with them first.
- Acknowledge the pain, let them feel sad, do not minimise their grief

Grief isn't something you can 'fix'

It is a natural response when we know someone is upset to want to fix things for them. Following the death of loved one however; the reality is that you can't 'fix' their grief. There is nothing you can say that will make a bereaved person feel better about their loss; but there are things you can do to provide comfort and support for them during this difficult time.

Approaches to avoid with a bereaved person include:

- telling them about your grief experience instead of listening to them
- comparing their grief with yours or anyone else's
- describing the 'stages of grief' and suggesting they're not moving through the stages quickly enough
- telling them they're grieving in the 'wrong' way
- giving them unsolicited advice about how they can best get over their grief
- reasoning with them about how they should or shouldn't feel.

See overleaf for more.

Comments to avoid

It is a natural reaction to want to ease the person's pain. However, well-meaning words that encourage the bereaved to 'look on the bright side' can be hurtful.

The type of comments that should be avoided include:

- 'You'll get married again one day.'
- 'At least you have your other children.'
- 'She's lucky she lived to such a ripe old age.'
- 'It was God's will.'
- 'You can always try for another baby.'
- 'He's happy in heaven.'
- 'Be thankful they're not in pain anymore.'
- 'Try to remember the good times.'
- 'You'll feel better soon.'
- 'Time heals all wounds.'
- 'Count your blessings. You still have a lot to be grateful for.'
- 'You've got to pull yourself together and be strong.'
- 'I know exactly how you feel.'
- 'Everything happens for a reason.'

What may be helpful?

- "I am sorry for your loss"
- "We all need help at times like this"
- "Have you got someone that you can talk to about this?"
- Grief is as individual as a finger print, don't compare yours or theirs to anyone else
- Do not give unsolicited advice about how they can get over their grief
- Do not reason with them about how they should or shouldn't feel
- Accept whatever feelings are expressed, do not say "You shouldn't feel like that". Whatever they are feeling is real for them.
- The bereaved person may ask Why? It is often a cry of pain rather than a question. It is not necessary to answer, but if you do, you may reply "I don't know why".

Suggestions for redirecting or ending a conversation in the workplace:

- Its lovely to chat, but I have a lot to get done this morning. I wonder if you know that there are other services which you might find helpful. Can I get you some information or brochures for you?
- Do you mind if I interrupt? I hear that you are really sad about..... Did you know that there are some services that might be helpful? Can I get you some brochures?
- "I need to excuse myself for a moment" or "Please excuse me,"
- "So nice talking with you! I apologise but I need to excuse myself".
- "I am sorry that you are sad, but you will have to excuse me, I am late for a meeting".

You have a responsibility to yourself and to other workers to ensure that your "Buttons" aren't pushed!!!!!! It is far better to end a conversation gently than to put yourself at risk.

Strategies that may help you if you feel distressed by a conversation in the workplace:

- Take a few minutes to regroup yourself, get a drink, take deep breaths, go to the bathroom or go outside if possible
- Ask another worker to take over while you take a moment to do this
- Talk to your manager or supervisor, especially if the conversation has impacted you strongly
- Practice self-care regularly – listen to music, go for a walk, exercise, meditate, have a "cuppa" with someone who understands and you are happy to talk to etc.

References:

Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement. (2017, February). Retrieved 2017, from Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement: <http://www.grief.org.au/>

How to support the bereaved. (2017, February). Retrieved 2017, from Better Health Channel: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/servicesandsupport/grief-how-to-support-the-bereaved>