



Practical suggestions to help you support someone who is bereaved

1. Keep in contact

Make a special effort to keep in contact after the funeral. It may be tempting to keep away, especially as you probably don't know what to say. But visits and telephone calls are helpful. Loss can make someone feel very lonely.

2. Be a good listener

Let the bereaved person talk about what they want. Allow them to talk about the person who has died and listen attentively. Don't worry if the conversation leads to either or both of you crying, this is perfectly natural and normal.

3. Don't make assumptions

All bereavements are different and people mourn their loss in their own way. Don't make assumptions as to how they will be feeling. Avoid saying, 'I know how you feel'. Encourage them to express their own feelings –whatever they are –they may be worried, angry, feeling guilty or even relieved. Try to understand their feelings and do not judge.

4. The importance of touch

Bereaved people often feel isolated and miss the warmth of human contact. It may help to hold their hand, put your arm around them or simply place a hand on their shoulder or elbow. Obviously use your discretion, it may not be appropriate for all people, but touch can be a very effective way of affirming friendship and letting them know you're there for them.

5. Offer practical help

If you can see that they are in need, then offer to help –or suggest where help could be obtained. Do not wait to be asked. Many find the simplest things too much. Domestic chores, cooking, paying bills or organising repairs can seem insignificant but if ignored can lead to challenging or serious problems. Remember, don't make assumptions –your offer of help may be declined, but you could always offer again another time.

6. Professional help

If necessary refer to professionals for help. If you notice a serious problem developing - e.g. over use of alcohol or drugs, serious self-neglect, malnutrition, total inertia or violent mood swings –you could express your concerns to their doctor or, if they belong to a religious group, their minister or priest. You may feel it appropriate to ask for their permission first, especially to contact their doctor. They will listen and may be able to help in a way that you cannot. But remember that they have a duty of confidentiality to the bereaved person.

7. Allow plenty of time

Grieving is a process which changes over the weeks, months and years, but your support will still be valuable. Anniversaries such as birthdays, a wedding anniversary, Christmas and the anniversary of the death are particularly difficult –it will help if you are aware of these events.

