

It can be difficult to know how to help someone who is recently bereaved. You may want to send a card, you may plan to go to the funeral, but there may be more that you can do. Find out here how you can support someone in one of life's hardest moments.

Close up of the hands of two people holding cups of tea

Sooner or later we will all know someone who has had someone they know die (has 'been bereaved'). If someone has died and your friend is grieving, you may be wondering how you can help. You may be tempted to avoid them because you feel you don't know what to say. You may be worried about making matters worse by saying the wrong thing.

The simple truth is that nothing you say will be able to take away the person's painful feelings. On the other hand, your attitude will speak volumes. Just spending time with them says that you care. So, do not worry about what to say. Very often, listening to the person who has had someone die is more important than saying the 'right' thing.

Listening

Most bereaved people feel the need to go over and over the details of the death. Doing so helps them take on board what has happened. They are beginning the slow process of getting the awful truth to sink in, however much they desperately want things to be different. Even though you may find it difficult to listen to the details, this is a powerful way to show your support.

There is no standard or 'right' way for someone to grieve. Most people feel a range of emotions as the days and weeks go by.

At the beginning, they can feel 'numb', as if someone has turned a switch.

- Then, most have times of sadness and may be very tearful.
- They may seem stuck in one emotion, believing they will never feel happy again.
- Or their moods may change rather quickly.
- Emotions may even overlap, so the person cries and laughs at the same time.

The details of the death make a big difference to how the person grieves.

- Many people have questions that keep coming back, often beginning with 'Why'.
- They may feel angry about the treatment the person received.
- They may feel guilty that they did not do more for the person.

Some people need to be left on their own to cry – while others want company while they keep busy, tackling simple jobs. But grief often makes people feel very tired, so they may prefer you to keep conversations and visits short.

Helping

If you'd like to do something practical, then you could offer to:

- Go shopping for them
- Prepare small, light meals or snacks
- Offer transport to them or others in the family
- Walk the dog
- Do the washing up, run the washing machine or do some basic housework
- Deal with phone calls and emails
- Help with paperwork
- Take the person to make the funeral arrangements
- Help them make simple decisions such as how to let people know about the death
- Offer to pray for them or help them to light a candle in church or online

These first few weeks are usually difficult for the person who is dealing with a bereavement. Having you at their side may make all the difference. Even though it will probably be hard for you too, you may look back on it as a special time in your own life.

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