

# Supporting Someone You Love Through Grief

**It isn't your grief.** Take the lead from them. Don't try to tell someone you care about how to grieve, what they should be doing and by which timescales. Be sensitive if sharing your own experience of grief and bear in mind that losing your dog *isn't* the same as losing a loved one. Even if you know them well and think you know what's best for them, avoid being tempted to impose your opinion when it comes to grief. Just be there to support them in whatever way they need you and leave your own agenda to one side. They will appreciate you much more for it.

**Listen more, talk less.** We live in a culture that doesn't do well without having solutions for everything! Don't try and fix them. Be aware of how much you are talking and try to listen more, without judgement, simply expressing compassion for what they are experiencing. Often people need to repeat their stories many times over as they process their loss, to talk & cry through painful, complex, mixed-up emotions. Bearing witness to their pain can be extremely challenging at times but so powerful for the griever who needs to feel heard.

**Be specific with how you can help.** A commonly heard phrase is "Call me if you need anything" but it's unlikely the person will call you. Not because they are being difficult but because grief causes overwhelm, confusion and disorientation. Make offers of help which are specific which might involve cooking, cleaning, sorting post, childcare. eg. "I will be round at 8.30am in the morning to pick the kids up for school." And make sure you follow through on your promises. Don't let them down. Neither are you their saviour, only take on what you can manage too. Try to get others to help out as well.



**Don't take it personally.** Try to understand a little about the grieving process. By doing so, you will learn that grief doesn't follow a particular path – your relative or friend may be happy one moment, sad the next, tell you they'll meet up with you tomorrow, then cancel at the last minute because they just can't face the world. It's not you and you need to know not to take offence by it – the emotions of grief are hugely fluctuating. It just takes time.

**Be present.** Sometimes just hanging out, not doing anything special is all that is needed. Sitting quietly with them can feel nurturing, even sitting together in silence; watching a film or engaging in some other activity can provide comfort. When we can't find the words to say what we feel, a touch or a hug can say everything. They know that you love them and are there for them and that's all that matters.

**Tackle projects together.** Some tasks are complex and/or emotionally-draining. This can include anything such as funeral arrangements, sorting out the will, phoning utility/financial organisations, clearing out rooms/houses. Don't assume how things should be done, take their lead and as always, commit to doing what you say you will do. Your loved one needs stability at a time when everything else is chaotic, so follow through on your promises.

**Protect and advocate for them.** Early grief can be particularly overwhelming and even sometimes the most well-meaning of gestures can feel intrusive to the griever. If it's appropriate, set yourself up as a spokesperson where you can keep friends & family informed whilst sheltering your bereaved relative/friend. It can also help to educate others in normalising grief ie. "He's up-and-down. Some days are better than others. Such a devastating loss turned his world up-side down, it would be impossible for him not to be changed by it."



**Grief doesn't have a convenient end date.** Do continue visiting and calling after a month or two. During the early days and weeks of grief, people often say they are well-supported with friends and family. But after the initial shock and the funeral is out of the way, frequently help and support tails off but this is when people need it most. Keep in touch regularly, whether you plan to see them, phone for a chat or sometimes just a 'thinking of you, today' text message can be greatly appreciated.

**Mention their name.** You may be tempted to avoid saying the name of the person who died for fear of causing further distress or might feel that it's just not healthy for them to keep talking about their loved one. When we live alongside loss (which is the truth of it) we can never 'get over' another person. We carry them in our hearts forever and many people truly appreciate it when someone else brings up their name. It tells them their loved one is not forgotten by others.

**Remember important dates.** Grief dates, birthdays and holidays can be painful reminders of loss and may trigger raw emotions, even years later. Reaching out to them on these significant dates lets them know that you are thinking of them.

**Offer ways to memorialize.** Besides funerals and memorials, our culture rarely has rituals to help remember our loved ones. We can also memorialize in ways such as planting trees, hosting a dinner in their honour, setting up a permanent memorial, creating a memorial video, visiting special places, contributing to a cause close to their heart, organising a charity event. Make suggestions and go along with those that resonate for them.

