



Talking with
someone who
has been
bereaved



It's what we do

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It's normal to feel awkward or worry about saying the wrong thing to someone who has been bereaved. Don't let your worries and fears stop you from being there for them. You can't bring back the person who has died but you can reassure them that they are not alone.

Everyone's experience will be different and there are no perfect words that will suit everyone, but here are some simple tips that can help.

- The first thing is to listen, and acknowledge their loss. Something as simple as, 'I'm so sorry to hear that your mum died', is a good start.
- Let them know that you are there to talk if and when they want to. You could ask 'How are you?' or 'Would you like to talk about it?'
- Someone who is grieving may experience a range of emotions and find it difficult to concentrate so give them time to speak, with pauses and silences if necessary. Don't rush to offer solutions or share your own experiences.
- It can help to reassure people that crying and other emotions like anger and regret are normal and that it's ok for them to share those feelings with you.
- If you knew the person who died, use their name and it can be comforting to share memories of times you spent together.
- Someone may seem to be upset by what you have said, but it doesn't necessarily mean that you have said something wrong. It's usually that it has triggered a memory or thought of the person who has died.
- For someone who has been bereaved, grief can last for a long time, when everyone else's lives have gone back to normal. Be there to talk and offer support for the long term.
- People's needs will change over time so ask what help they need. Offering practical support like picking up the children or doing someone shopping can be helpful.

While there are no absolute right or wrongs about what to say here are some things that may be best avoided:

- When we don't know what to say, we can fall back on cliché e.g., 'time is a great healer' or 'at least they had a good innings', etc. but these can sound a bit stilted and may not be helpful.
- Be sensitive to saying things that relate to religion. They may not share your faith. Even if someone follows a particular faith, phrases like 'they are in a better place' may be upsetting as they may be angry with their God that their loved one has died.
- Try not to assume you know how someone will be feeling. Your experience of grief will be different to theirs, so listen to their experiences and understand what support they need.
- It's understandable to want to make things better for people when you see that they are upset. Remember that this is a normal part of grieving. Don't avoid talking about the person who died, as people don't want to forget them but find ways of carrying their memory with them.
- If you are concerned for someone, that they are finding it difficult to cope, please do encourage them to seek further support – Cruse, GP, etc.

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