



# Moving from Sympathy to Empathy



*Connecting with people from a place of empathy, not sympathy, to make transactions smoother and more positive on both sides.*

## **There is no perfect thing to say**

When we are talking to those in grief, our first instinct about what to say often comes from a place of sympathy. It's much more comfortable to stand at a distance, so people tend to focus on their own needs instead of the needs of the griever themselves.

Let go of a desire for perfection. There is nothing you can say that will “fix” the person’s grief. But there are things that are more helpful to say than others.

### **Kinds of statements to avoid:**

- Making it about you — “When my mom passed last year...”
- Bright side statements — “They’re in a better place now,” or anything that starts with the phrase “At least...”
- Trying to “solve” it — Unsolicited advice like “You should get out more”



empathy.

### More helpful alternatives

- Validate their emotions — “That sounds really difficult”
- Ask what they need at this moment — “What can I do to help you process your claim?”
- Emphasize that you are here to support them — “I’m here to help you get access to these benefits as soon as possible”
- Leave space for silence

### Compassionately keeping the conversation on track

In the fog of grief, it can be really hard to stay focused on one task. It’s common for people to get distracted, go off on tangents, forget the purpose of their call, or get caught up on the many other tasks they have to complete.

Patience is key. Keep track of the conversation by taking notes, so that when they are ready to circle back, you understand how and why they got there. Look for opportunities to connect their concerns with the task that you can help with. And remember, it is OK to explicitly steer the conversation back to the claim.

If the individual seems especially distressed, you can offer resources. Empathy offers 1:1 support for bereaved families for a variety of needs—everything from emotional support to logistics.

### Understanding Logistics of loss

The call with you is one of hundreds of phone calls this person will have to make. Most people aren’t prepared for just how much work there is after a loved one dies. These tasks take longer and are more complicated than families expect.

In total, it takes families an average of 12.5 months to resolve all financial matters, and they spend a median of 12 hours per week on these tasks. It is an incredibly emotionally and physically draining process.

But you are in a unique position to give them exactly what they need—and the relationship you forge within this transaction will stay with them.

For more resources, visit [empathy.com/nyl-claims-grief-training](https://empathy.com/nyl-claims-grief-training)