

THE SECRET TO SUPPORTING SOMEONE WHO IS GRIEVING

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When someone close to you experiences a loss, it's likely to affect you too. Even if you want to help them through the grieving process, you may be unsure about what to do.

In fact, the situation may be more complicated than you think. Most experts believe that the popular theory about the 5 stages of grief is a myth. In reality, **the experience is different for each individual.**

Skillful support can ease the burden on family and friends who have lost a loved one. Study these suggestions now so you'll be prepared to help them in their time of need.

Short Term Strategies

It's natural for the bereaved to feel overwhelmed at first. They'll probably appreciate you for being there for them even if they're unable to respond effectively for a while.

Use these strategies to help:

1. **Reach out.** Maybe you're tempted to pull away in case you say something inappropriate. However, if you can deal with your discomfort, **any effort you make will probably be comforting.**
2. **Keep it simple.** Sincerity matters more than being profound. Brief condolences or store-bought sympathy cards will be appreciated.
3. **Divide responsibilities.** If you're especially close to the bereaved, you may be

able to help with the necessary arrangements. That could range from contacting other loved ones to providing care for children and pets.

4. **Offer assistance.** What if you didn't know the departed well? Depending on the situation, it might still be kind to bring food or offer to collect the mail.

Long Term Strategies

The grieving process usually continues long after the funeral is over. Be patient as they work through their feelings.

Consider using these ideas as time goes on:

1. **Remember milestones.** Special occasions like birthdays and holidays often stir up strong memories. **An invitation to lunch or a Facebook post can let others know that you're thinking of them.**
2. **Listen closely.** Talking is an important part of healing. Give your time and attention to the bereaved, so they can tell their story.
3. **Share memories.** Did you have your own happy or meaningful experiences with the deceased? You might contribute to the conversation by providing your own perspective.
4. **Validate emotions.** Grieving often involves feelings that make us uncomfortable, such as anger and sadness. **Let the bereaved know that you accept them as they are without making any judgements.**
5. **Address secondary losses.** On the practical side, your loved ones may also be dealing with legal and financial issues related to their loss. They might be grateful for someone to act as a sounding board or provide information about

relevant resources.

6. **Encourage self-care.** Someone who is grieving might forget to look after their own wellbeing. If you're concerned, talk with them about their daily routines or ask someone they trust to intervene.

7. **Honor your needs.** Any death might trigger feelings about your own past experiences. As much as you care about your family and friends, **you may need to step back if helping them is having an adverse effect on you.**

8. **Consider counseling.** Talking with a professional therapist or joining a support group has helped many families through the grieving process. Let your loved ones know that help is available if they seem open to the idea.

9. **Adjust your expectations.** On the other hand, death is a natural part of life. Research suggests that most families reach some level of acceptance within about 6 months. Be patient with your loved ones and their unique needs.

Social support plays a major role in helping someone to move on after experiencing a major loss. Staying in touch with family and friends who are grieving can give them hope for the future and bring you closer together.