



# Dying Matters

**Talking to  
someone  
who is grieving**

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## It's OK to feel unsure

It can be difficult to know what to say when someone loses a loved one. It's totally normal to worry about saying the wrong thing or getting in the way. But it's usually better to do something than say nothing, and there are plenty of ways you can show you're there for someone if they need you or want to talk.

## Taking the first steps

### **Look for signs someone is ready for a chat**

If they mention the person who has died, try to encourage them. Even if they get upset, it's likely to mean they want to talk.

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### **Remember words aren't always needed**

Sometimes it just helps to be there for someone. Let them know you're ready to talk or not talk – whatever works for them.

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### **Don't be upset if your support is turned down**

Talking after losing a loved one can seem daunting, especially at first. Just keep reminding the person they can reach out to you whenever they're ready.

## **Don't worry if people repeat themselves**

Sometimes going over what's happened can help people come to terms with it.

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## **Give people space**

Be careful not to smother people with sympathy. Often time alone is what's needed to process feelings after a death.

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# **What might help**

There's no perfect way to support someone who is grieving. None of us say the right thing every time. But you just being there will mean a lot.

If someone wants to talk, really listen and ask open-ended questions. It's a good way to get a conversation going, rather than asking questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no'.

Offering practical support can make a big difference too. You could try making a direct offer - 'I can pick the kids up from school' - rather than saying 'I'm here for anything you need'.

Try to keep checking in as time passes. The weeks and months after the funeral can be the hardest of all, but birthdays, anniversaries, holidays and New Year are tough for a lot of people too.

Invite people to join you for social activities like going for a coffee or a walk. Even if they don't feel up to it, it can mean a lot to be asked.

# What to be careful of

The fact that you're reading this leaflet shows you're someone who cares and wants to say the right thing. But there are some things that can upset people, even when you're trying to help.

Saying you know how someone feels can be unhelpful. Losing someone is different for everyone, and saying 'I know how you feel' can make it seem like you're not really listening.

Talking about time is a tricky area too. It's easy to fall back on phrases like 'Time is a great healer' or 'You'll move on soon'. But everyone grieves in their own way and at their own pace.

When you are talking to someone who is grieving, try not to dominate the conversation or act as if nothing has happened. Lots of people say they find it hard when people avoid talking about the person they have lost.

If you have a faith, try to remember that it might not help others, even if it is very important to you.

And don't assume people are OK because they seem to be on the surface. Keep checking in and letting them know you're there for them. It can be a long time before people feel ready to talk about what they're going through.



# For more help and support

- The **Hospice UK website** has information about where to get bereavement support [hospiceuk.org/get-bereavement-support](https://hospiceuk.org/get-bereavement-support)
- Your **local hospice** can point you towards more support near you. To find your local hospice, visit [hospiceuk.org/hospice-care-finder](https://hospiceuk.org/hospice-care-finder)
- Hospice UK's **Compassionate Employers** has information on grief in the workplace [hospiceuk.org/compassionate-employers](https://hospiceuk.org/compassionate-employers)





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for more support, stories and advice:  
[hospiceuk.org/dm-newsletter](https://hospiceuk.org/dm-newsletter)

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