



## supporting someone who is grieving

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**When someone you know is grieving**, there is often a sense of helplessness about how best to help and a fear of saying or doing the wrong thing. However, doing or saying nothing at all can exacerbate their pain and leave them feeling isolated, confused, and hurt around the perceived loss of support.

**If you are feeling lost** and can't find the words, one of the most precious gifts you can give someone who is grieving, is not to try to fix them or fill the gaps with words, but to sit in silence and listen.

- Accept that you cannot take away the pain or gloss over the loss with wise words and stories about your own and others' losses.
- A personal visit, phone call or hand written note can be comforting. Potted plants, flowers, or small personal thoughtful gifts are also an acceptable way to express your feelings.
- When someone is grieving their energy levels are low and they will tire easily, so be aware of keeping your visits short, or ask them to let you know when they want some time alone.
- Offer to be available to help out with the practical day to day chores, such as driving, cleaning, cooking, shopping, gardening. Be mindful about asking permission before jumping in to help, and check out their specific needs.
- Realise that your friend is a unique individual and will grieve in their own unique way, in their own time.
- Give them permission to express their pain without judging or dismissing their feelings. Let them know they are safe and that it's okay to cry, shout, scream or be angry about their loss in your company.
- When we see someone hurting, it is a normal human response to want to ease their pain. However, with the best of intentions, our words can be insensitive. Avoid statements such as: 'I know how you feel', 'It's for the best', 'Be grateful he/she didn't suffer', 'There are plenty of fish in the sea', 'You are blessed to have had so many years together', 'Get on with it', 'You've got to be strong'. Instead, validate their pain by listening and reflecting.
- Remember you don't have to say anything, sometimes your presence in their life is all they need.
- Make a note of the date of your friend's loss and give them a call or send a note on those days. Family holiday times may also be tough.
- In the initial stages of grief, there is a degree of shock and denial, and for the first few weeks or so they have lots of support and personal details to take care of. However, there comes a time when they begin to realise the finality of their loss. When this occurs they sometimes feel they are going crazy. You can help by making regular contact throughout the months ahead.
- While it is a privilege to walk with someone through grief, it is also important to nurture and care for yourself. Don't get on board the 'guilt train'. If you feel tired and overwhelmed, it's okay to take time-out to reboot your own energy levels. Taking a break for *you* will enrich your body, mind and spirit.
- Most importantly be proud that you have had the courage to face your fears and be available to make a difference to someone who's grieving.

**It is not unusual** for those who are grieving to make statements about 'being with their loved one' or verbalising a belief like they 'can't go on without them'. If you are concerned about the mental health of the person you are supporting, talk to them, acknowledge their pain and ask the hard questions.

**Jan Bond** is a Clinical Counsellor in Private Practice on the Gold Coast, Queensland. Specialising in Grief and Loss, Jan offers those who are grieving a warm, safe and non-judgemental environment in which they can share their loves, lives and losses. Phone: 0411 888 628 Email: [jan@janbond.com.au](mailto:jan@janbond.com.au)