



For Nurses

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Some ideas to help you give comfort and support in a hospital setting.

Nurses have often shared with me their concern about what they can do to be supportive when a death occurs in the hospital. Amidst their experience and medical training, there may not have been much information on how to help grieving families. The struggle to find the right words and say the right things can be stressful and awkward. If you are a nurse or work in a medical setting, here are some ideas to guide you.

1. You can give comfort

This means being a shoulder to cry on, holding a hand, allowing tears to flow, just being there, not necessarily saying anything.



2. You can be informative.

After someone has died, many people have no idea what to do next. Even if you ask if they have any questions, often they don't know what those questions are. They can be in shock, they can be numb, they can be confused and agitated, or they may be on auto pilot and want to get things done straight away. Expect all kinds of reactions.

Explain what happens next:

You will be attending to their loved one - removing any medical apparatus, washing, dressing - whatever the protocol is. Is there anything special they want done right now?

Where does the body go now?

When do you call the funeral director? Perhaps you can make this call.

Do they wish to see a chaplain or social worker?

Is there someone who needs to be contacted now?

CLIMB IN THE HOLE.
EMPA & NEVER
THY "AT LEAST."
 BRENE BROWN

3. You can allow private time

Explain there is no rush to leave the bedside. It's alright to stay a while. Sometimes people are fearful of a dead body and you may need to offer your support and explain what to expect and that there is nothing to be afraid of.

Doris Zagdanski is a leading figure in modern day grief and loss education. Her seminars are included in vocational qualifications in Allied Health, Counselling and Funeral Directing. This Factsheet is adapted from Doris' book **Stuck for Words** and is available at www.allaboutgrief.com



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4. You can acknowledge their loss

There is no need to avoid talking about what's happened. Use their loved one's name, open up a conversation about them and see what they meant to their family.

Be empathetic:

"I can see why he/she was so special to you."

"You were really close, weren't you."

"You've been through a lot together during his/her illness."

5. You can be realistic.

You don't have to fix their grief. Let's face it, there are no perfect words that you can say that will make everything right.

It's alright to say: "I don't know what I can say right now." OR "I wish you didn't have to go through this."

And it's OK to say you're not

- It's OK to have some tears in your eyes or be choked up. Families don't expect you to be made of stone.

- If you're upset, talk to a colleague, an understanding friend or visit with your EAP. It takes courage to ask for help and it's OK to say I'm not OK.

6. You can do something nice for yourself too.

Have strategies outside of work to fill you up when you're depleted. Exercise. Meditation. Massage. Quiet time just for yourself. Gardening. Reading. Coffee with a friend. Beach walking. Movies or music. Buy yourself flowers. Take a nap or a relaxing bath. Do something that clears your head and gives you a break. Anything that makes you feel replenished. You don't even have to spend money on yourself, just make time for yourself a priority. Remember, you deserve good care too.

"I have come to believe that caring for myself is not self indulgent. Caring for myself is an act of survival." - Audre Lorde

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