

emotionally. From seemingly nowhere, profound tears may well up. All of this is completely normal.

Helping a Grieving Child

As with an adult, the best gift you can offer a grieving child is your loving care. First, get in touch with your own feelings and how you are making sense of the loss. Then, in very simple and concrete terms, gently explain why the beloved person is no longer alive. Answer any questions as a way to model open communication.

Here are some other suggestions:

Do and Don'ts

Do

- allow a child, however young, to attend a funeral.
- pass on your spiritual values about life and death
- meet regularly as a family to find out how everyone is coping
- pray with your child (if that is part of your belief system)
- find a way to help children symbolize and represent the death
- pay attention to the way a child plays; this is one of children's main ways of communicating.

Do Not

- try to shelter children from the reality of death; it can be a learning experience
- give false or confusing messages, like "grandma is sleeping now."
- say to stop crying because others might get upset
- force a child to publicly mourn if he or she doesn't want to
- hesitate to cry in the presence of a child; you are demonstrating that it is acceptable for the child's feelings to be expressed, too
- turn your child into your personal confidante; rely on another adult or a support group instead.
- lie

Children can be extra sensitive to death, especially if they do not comprehend what has happened. Once you understand that children express themselves through stories, games and artwork, you can look for clues about how they are coping. Encourage this self-expression. It is a window of opportunity for you, the adult, to work through any unfinished grieving from your own childhood.

Resources

Irish Association of Suicidology
www.ias.ie

National Suicide Bereavement Support Network (NSBSN)
www.nsbsn.org

CONSOLE
www.console.ie

Living Links
www.livinglinks.ie



Suggested Reading

A Special Scar: The Experience of People Bereaved by Suicide by A. Wertheimer (2001)

After Suicide: Help for the Bereaved by Dr. Sheila Clark (1995)

A Voice for Those Bereaved by Suicide by Sarah McCarthy (2005)

After Suicide: A Ray of Hope for Those Left Behind by E. Betsy Ross, Joseph Richman, and Eleanora Betsy Ross (2002)

Aftershock: Help, Hope, and Healing in the Wake of Suicide by Arrington Cox, Candy David, David Cox, and Candy Arrington (2003)

No Time to Say Goodbye: Surviving The Suicide Of A Loved One by Carla Fine (1999)

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Helping / Supporting
Someone Who is **Grieving**

Introduction

Regardless of the type of loss, there is a normal process of grieving. Understanding the nature of grief and bereavement will give you insight and allow you to help someone else cope with this process.

Once the funeral is over and the cards and flowers stop pouring in, there is still a need for support. Bereavement can be a lonely and frightening experience for many people. Even though death is often portrayed in popular entertainment, as a whole Westerners have difficulty openly expressing their feelings around grief and sadness. With no public outlet for their pain, the bereaved must rely on members of their social network for caring assistance, at both a practical and emotional level. Family members may be too preoccupied with their own grief to be able to reach out. This is where friends, co-workers and neighbors can be instrumental in the healing process.

Understanding the Basics of the Grieving Process

- It is normal and necessary to experience intense emotional sensations in order to heal properly
- Feelings of guilt, embarrassment and anger are part of the restorative process
- Each person grieves differently
- There is no set timetable for bereavement.

Helping Someone who is Grieving

The most important thing you can do is just be there. You might not know exactly what to say or do. That is alright. Just don't let your discomfort keep you away from the person who is grieving. Now more than ever, your support is needed. Be willing to push past the awkwardness and be honest and straightforward. You don't have to solve the problem; simply provide a listening ear.

Grieving people may carry an incredible load of guilt about what they should or shouldn't have done.

What you can do is:

- Let them know how much you care;
- Affirm that they have done and are doing their best
- Encourage them to keep talking about their feelings.

Even if you feel uncomfortable, provide an atmosphere in which your bereaved friend or family member has the permission to talk about the person who died. Talk candidly about that person by name. Ask sensitive questions that allow for open expression of feelings—without being nosy.

What to Say to a Bereaved Person

When in doubt, err on the side of silent, yet emotionally connected support. If you can't think of something to say, just offer eye contact or the squeeze of your hand. Your contribution can be as simple as your silent presence. You don't have to have all the answers. No one understands why this tragedy happened. What the bereaved person needs to know is that you will be there as a companion in this sorrowful time, even though you can't take away the pain. The bereaved may have feelings of poor self-worth. Allow them to give voice to their anger or sadness, to scream, cry, or knead one hand with the other, for example. Have confidence that they will again find meaning and joy in life.

Do and Don'ts

Do

- act natural
- show genuine concern
- offer love patiently and unconditionally
- offer hugs or an arm around the shoulder, as appropriate
- sit next to the person who wants closeness
- make it clear you are there to listen
- express your care and concern
- say that you are sorry about the loss
- say "I love you" if you are close enough
- talk openly and directly about the person who died
- cry if you feel like crying
- keep in mind that evenings, weekends, anniversaries and holidays can be extra challenging times.

Do Not

- try to avoid the bereaved person
- pry into personal matters
- ask questions about the circumstances of the death
- offer advice or quick solutions:
 - "I know how you feel."
 - "You should ____."

- "Time heals all wounds."
- try to cheer the person up or distract from the emotional intensity:
 - "At least he's no longer in pain."
 - "She's in a better place now."
 - "It was God's timing/will."
- minimise the loss:
 - "Oh, it's not that bad."
 - "You'll be ok."
 - "Things will go back to normal before you know it."
- lead the bereaved to the false assumption that self-medicating with alcohol or drugs will provide a solution. This is only a temporary fix for the emotional pain and actually makes it worse in the long term.

Other Ways to Help

Because grief can be a confusing and overwhelming experience, it is really great when you suggest something specific. It is hard for many people to ask for help. They might feel guilty about having so much attention or not want to be a burden on others. If you say, "Let me know if there's anything I can do," a grieving person may feel uncomfortable about getting back to you.

Be the one who takes the initiative to:

- Pick up the phone to just check in
- Offer to run errands or get groceries
- Drop off a casserole or other type of food
- Watch children to provide some down time
- Tag along at a bereavement support group meeting
- Go for a brisk walk together
- Do an enjoyable activity (game, puzzle, art project)
- Encourage going out and socializing once the person feels ready

When a loved one dies, the surviving friends and family members find constant reminders of their loss. They may miss that person even more on special occasions. So take the opportunity to invite them over to your home or out to eat. A card or short note is also a thoughtful way to show your concern. Consistency is very helpful, if you can manage it – being there for as long as it takes. This helps the grieving person look forward to your attentiveness without having to make the additional effort of asking again and again. Be aware that certain memorable dates may prove more difficult