

How to Comfort a Grieving Person

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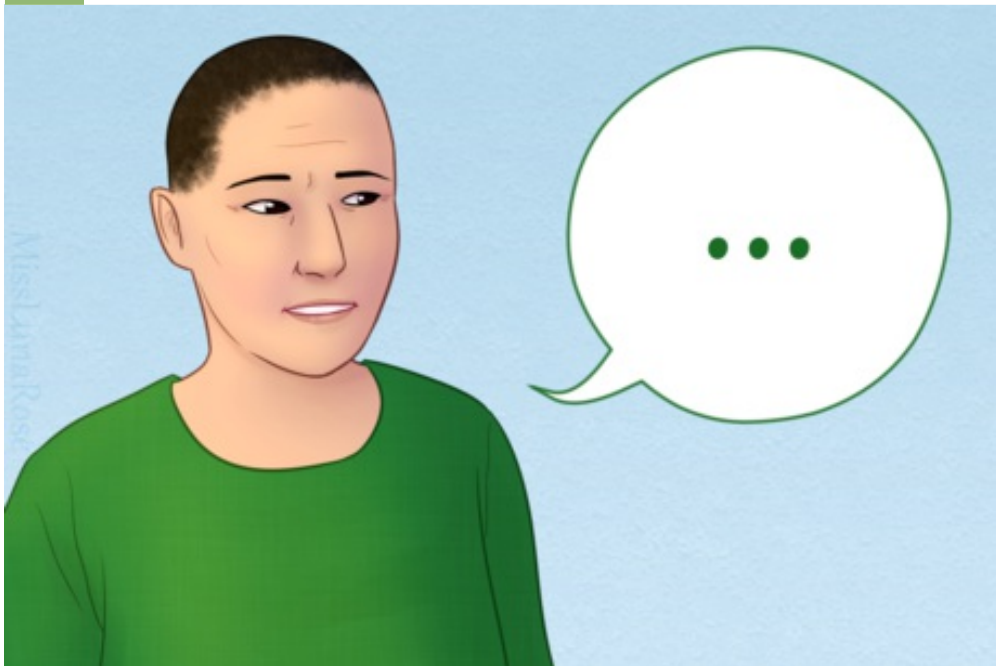
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It can be difficult to know what to say and what to do when someone is grieving. You want to support them and help them feel better, but you may not know how you can comfort them. Knowing how to handle this delicate situation can be hard, but you can comfort a grieving person if you offer them comforting words, show them your support, and continue to provide them comfort.

Method 1

Method 1 of 3: Offering Comforting Words



1 Acknowledge the death. When you see the grieving person, let them know that you are aware of the death.^[1] Or, even send them a message or give them a call. Trying to avoid saying anything direct can make things more awkward. Acknowledging the death opens the door for the person to turn to you for comfort.

- You might acknowledge the death of a neighbor's family member by saying, "I was sorry to learn your sister passed away."



2 Be thoughtful about wording. If someone died violently, avoid words like "murdered" or "stabbed," which only remind people what a terrible death it was. Stick to saying that they passed away. If it was a suicide, say that they "passed away" or "died of suicide."

- For example, if a neighbor's son was killed in a mugging, you could offer support by saying, "I heard about how your son passed away. That's terrible."
- In cases of suicide, treat it as you would any other tragic and unexpected death—which is what suicide is. Never suggest that suicide is a selfish act, or otherwise speak badly of the deceased. Also avoid blaming loved ones for not noticing signs.
- Avoid talking about "what-if's", such as how the deceased would still be alive if they'd sought therapy, or hadn't left the house that day. Creating hypothetical situations only adds to the feelings of guilt and helplessness in those who knew them.



3 Show your genuine concern and validate their feelings. Comfort them by letting them know that you care about them and their loss. Be honest and heartfelt in what you say. Being empathetic will show them that you are here to support them during this time.[2]

- Use a gentle, compassionate tone of voice and, when possible, refer to the deceased person by name.[3]
- For example, if your church member's husband died you might say something like, "I know Manuel was important to you. I know I can't take away your pain, but I'm very sorry for your loss."
- Try to avoid phrases like "God needed another angel" or "The grief will fade in time." They can make you sound insensitive to the grieving person's pain.
- Try phrases like "This is really shocking and I honestly don't know what to say," "I'm so sorry to hear that," and "That must be really rough."



- 4 Offer specific support.** Asking "What can I do to help?" might not be helpful, because when a person is grieving they are often too overwhelmed to even think of an answer. Comfort them by offering to do things that you know or think might be helpful right now.^[4]
- Think about practical things they could use help with like cooking, cleaning, babysitting, or taking care of a pet.
 - For example, you might tell your neighbor, "I'll bring some lasagna on Friday. You prefer it with no spices, right?"
 - Offer your support, but don't push yourself on them. Offer support twice. If they still refuse, let them know the offer still stands if they change their mind.
 - For instance, if a grieving friend said they don't want the class notes, you might say, "Are you sure? I don't mind bringing them." If they still say no, say, "Okay, but let me know if you change your mind."
 - If you want to help, but don't know what to do then ask someone close to them for suggestions for how you can support the grieving person.



5 Share memories. Talking about a loved one who has died can be a helpful way to remember the person and develop an understanding of your feelings.^[5] If you know the deceased person, it can comfort the grieving person for you to share memories that you have. Knowing that you are thinking of the dead person and that you remember them will help the grieving person cope.^[6]

- For example, if your best friend's brother died, you could say, "He was a great tennis player. Could I tell you about one of my favorite memories of him on the court?"
- Keep your recollections positive and brief. You want to comfort the grieving person, not overwhelm, bore, or upset them.
- For instance, you might tell your friend one or two funny stories about his brother and then move the conversation on.
- Be understanding if they aren't ready to share memories yet.

Method 2 of 3: Showing Your Support



- 1 Listen to them.** Sometimes it comforts a grieving person to talk about how they are feeling or share memories they have of the deceased. They don't necessarily want you to do or say anything, they just want and need someone to present and listen to them.
 - Show you are paying attention by facing the person and making eye contact with them while they are talking.
 - Remove distractions so that you can listen without interruption. Turn off the music, put aside your work, and put your electronic devices on silent.
 - Instead of thinking about how you should respond, just focus on hearing what they are saying.
 - Allow and encourage them to talk.^[7] Ask open-ended questions to let them know you are listening and encourage them to talk.
 - For example, you might ask your workout partner, "What is your fondest memory of your aunt?"



2 Let them cry. It may be a bit uncomfortable for you, but letting a grieving person express their feelings is good for them. So, allow the person to shed a few tears, scream, or shout if needed. You may not even need to say anything. Just being there reassures them.

- You may want to say things like, "It's okay to let it out" or "I'm here for you."
- If it is in a public place, let curious people know that they are just grieving and that no help is needed.
- If necessary, try to move the grieving person somewhere that they can grieve without onlookers.
- Make sure they are in a safe place. If possible, remove anything that might hurt them (or that they might use to hurt themselves) in the event they become extremely upset.
- If they become agitated to the point that you fear for their safety, call for help.



3 Expect mood swings. The grieving process is different for each person. But some feelings like anger, guilt, sadness, despair, hope and acceptance are normal and common to grief.^[8] You can help comfort a grieving person better if you don't take their mood swings personally.

- If they say something mean or hurtful, just remember that it is the grief talking, not the person. You can address the comment at a later time, if you need to address it at all.
- For example, if your girlfriend snaps at you for no reason, you might wait a few minutes and then say, "I know you didn't mean what you said, but it hurt my feelings."
- If you need to, take a short break from the person. Take a few deep breaths and remind yourself that they don't mean to act that way.



4 Be there to have fun together if they'd like. Sometimes, people may want to talk about it, but they may also want to take their mind off of things sometimes and just have fun for a while. If so, let them not talk about it, and do something fun like getting ice cream or playing with a pet.

Method 3 of 3: Continuing to Provide Comfort



1 Give them time to grieve. Each person is different, so grieving processes are different. Some may grieve for a relatively short amount of time; some may grieve for what seems like a long time. Comfort a grieving person by allowing them to take the time they need to come to terms with their loss.^[9]

- Check up on them periodically. Don't just see how they are doing immediately after the loss, check on them in the weeks and months following.
- Be aware of trigger days like birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays that may be particularly hard for a grieving person.
- Try to make yourself available to support them on and around these days.
- For example, you might want to keep the anniversary of the death of your partner's father free from other events.



2 Get them active. You can comfort a grieving person and help them heal by getting them involved in an activity. Whether it's getting them back in the routine of doing things they did before, or introducing them to something new, being involved in activities can help distract them, fill their time, and lift their mood.

- Invite them for a walk, bike ride, yoga session, or game of table tennis. Physical activity is good for the body and for the mind.
- Suggest that you two volunteer somewhere or participate in a community event for a good cause.
- Giving back to the community can help the grieving person feel connected to the world again.
- Attend a grief support group with them. It may help them to be around other people experiencing the same feelings and challenges they are.



3 Form a support team. The grieving person may need support and comfort for a while and you shouldn't and probably can't help them with everything they may need. Identify a few friends and family that are willing and able to help the grieving person over time.^[10]

- Try to organize a couple of people that can take turns checking on the grieving person.
- Perhaps each week one of you calls the person to check in and lets the rest of the group know how things are going.
- Check with other members of the group if you notice something that concerns you. Ask them to do the same.
- For instance, if you notice your roommate hasn't eaten in a few days, you could let her parents or siblings know so that you all can help her with her grief.



4 Encourage them to seek professional help. Sometimes grief may cause more pain than a person can cope with on their own, or even with the support of friends and family. If someone you know is struggling to cope with their grief, then it is important to encourage them to seek professional help, such as by seeing a therapist.^[11]

- Try offering to take the person to see their family doctor and get a referral or offer to help them find a therapist they can speak to.
- You might try saying something like, "It seems like you have been struggling and I would like to help if I can. Would you be willing to let me make an appointment for you to see your doctor?"



Community Q&A

Question

A friend's mother died. How can I help them?



Community Answer

They may not be ready to talk about it, but reassure them that you are there for a shoulder to cry on or just to talk to when they are ready. Keep them calm and maybe treat them to take their mind off things for a while.

Helpful 6 Not Helpful 0

Question

My younger sibling has lost a very good friend and is very sad. What should I do?



Community Answer

Spend some extra time with your sibling, and offer to talk about the friend if they would like to. Let them know that grieving is normal, and be accepting of however they choose to express that grief. If they don't want to talk about it, do something fun to take their mind off things. Play a game with your sibling, go on a bike ride, or take them out for ice cream, whatever you think they would find fun.

Helpful 6 Not Helpful 0

Question

My boyfriend lost his grandfather, any advice?



Community Answer

Just be there for him and follow his lead. People grieve in many different ways so you will have to be there for him while he grieves in whatever way is good for him.

Helpful 5 Not Helpful 0

Question

How can I help my autistic 13-year-old daughter if we're both grieving? She says that she's never gonna talk to me about it. Help?



Community Answer

Just let her know that you are there for her at any time she might want to talk. Remind her gently that talking about feelings almost always helps, even if we don't feel like doing it. Then, just give her some space and avoid pressuring her. She may decide to come talk to you in time, but if she doesn't, and you notice any worrisome behavior, make an appointment with a therapist. Also, make sure you have someone to talk to about your own grief, preferably a professional. Don't neglect your feelings while worrying about your daughter's. I'm sorry for your loss.

Helpful 3 Not Helpful 0



Tips

- Don't be afraid to offer a hug. A simple hug may be all that is needed.
- You could write a sympathy card or email to let them know you are thinking of them at this difficult time.
- Keep in mind that grief may look different from person to person, but there are often stages. Learn how to recognize the [stages of grief](#) to get more insight into what the person might be going through.



Warnings

- If the person doesn't wish to talk about how they are feeling, don't push it. Perhaps they would rather keep their mind off of it. If so, try lifting their spirits with an uplifting conversation.
- If you think the person may hurt themselves (or someone else), contact a professional or the authorities so that you can help keep the person safe.

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This article was medically reviewed by **Shari Forschen, NP, MA**. Shari Forschen is a Registered Nurse at Sanford Health in North Dakota. She received her Family Nurse Practitioner Master's from the University of North Dakota and has been a nurse since 2003. This article has been viewed 25,738 times.

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