

Hope for Healing



S U P P O R T

Bereavement Services Available:

- *Individual grief counseling*
- *Mending Hearts grief support group:: open to the community. Please call the number below for current schedule*
- *Educational resources and referrals to groups in your area available upon request.*

Building Up Your Support Network

When you enter the world of bereavement, you do not need to grieve alone—nor should you try. The loss of a loved one is one of the most challenging things we have to face in life. To most efficiently and effectively work through your grief, it is important to surround yourself with as many supportive resources as possible. Our culture often forces us to adopt ways of avoiding and withdrawing from the painful, yet necessary work of grieving, but anyone who has travelled the journey of grief knows that it is okay to lean on your friends and family for support during this difficult time.

When sufficient support isn't available from family and friends, you become responsible for your own healing by reaching out to find the support you need. Churches, bible studies, neighborhood centers, AA groups, activity clubs, senior centers, classes (such as college, continuing education, or workshops), and support groups can all be good places to find that additional support.

Many people have found that support groups have provided a safe place where they can reconcile their losses and find new meaning in life.

Some examples of how support groups help grievers include:

- ◆ *Providing emotional, physical, and spiritual support in a safe, nonjudgmental environment*
- ◆ *Providing education about the grief process and helpful coping techniques*
- ◆ *Meeting new people who have had similar experiences, thoughts and feelings*
- ◆ *Avoiding the sense of isolation which many experience in our shame-based, mourning-avoiding culture*
- ◆ *Allowing members to explore their thoughts and feelings about grief in a way that helps them be compassionate with themselves*
- ◆ *Exchanging ideas, knowledge and memories with other members*
- ◆ *Learning new ways to cope and approach problems with grief*
- ◆ *Giving them a forum to explore meaning in life and death*
- ◆ *Providing them a greater capacity to be more patient and gracious with themselves*

Contact:

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Grief and sadness knits two hearts in closer bonds than happiness ever can; and common sufferings are far stronger than common joys.

~Alphonse De Lamartine

Supporting a Grieving Person

HELPING OTHERS THROUGH GRIEF, LOSS, AND BEREAVEMENT

It can be difficult to know how to best support a loved one when they are grieving. It's common to feel awkward, helpless, or unsure. You may be afraid of intruding, saying the wrong thing, or making the person feel even worse. Don't let discomfort prevent you from reaching out to someone who is grieving. Now, more than ever, your support is needed.

The bereaved often struggle with many intense and frightening emotions. Often, they feel isolated and alone in their grief. Though you can't take away the pain of the loss, your support and caring presence will help your loved one cope with the pain and begin to heal. Below are some tips to get you started.



1. **Understand the Bereavement Process.** Every person is unique and therefore experiences grief in his or her own unique way. Recovery after bereavement takes an average of 18 to 24 months, but can be shorter or longer depending on the person. It does not always follow predictable, orderly stages, but rather moves like a rollercoaster, moving between highs and lows. Extreme emotions and behaviors are common, such as having a "short fuse" before bursting out in anger or crying for hours on end. The bereaved need reassurance that what they're feeling is normal. Try not to judge them, tell them what they "should" be doing, pressure them to move on, or take their reactions personally.
2. **Listen With Compassion.** You may be worried about what to say, but listening is much more important. Accept and acknowledge all their feelings and let them tell the story of their loss over and over if needed, as this is a way of processing the death. If they don't feel like talking, don't pressure them. Be willing to just sit with them in silence and be a comforting presence.
3. **Offer Practical Assistance.** It's difficult for many grieving people to ask for help. They might fear being a burden or be too depressed to reach out. You can make it easier for them by taking the initiative. Make specific suggestions, such as, "I'm going to the store this afternoon. What can I get for you while I'm there?" or "I've made a big pot of stew for dinner. When can I come by and bring you some?" Other ideas for assistance include: helping with funeral arrangements, taking phone calls for them and receiving guests, helping with insurance forms or bills, taking care of housework, watching their children or picking them up from school, going with them to a support group meeting, accompanying them on a walk, or sharing an enjoyable activity (game, puzzle, art project, etc.)
4. **Provide Ongoing Support.** Grieving continues long after the funeral is over and the cards and flowers have stopped. Once the other mourners are gone and the initial shock of the loss has worn off, your bereaved loved one will need you more than ever. If you can manage it, be there for as long as it takes. Stay in touch with the grieving person, periodically checking in, sending letters, or providing practical help. Certain times and days of the year will be particularly hard for the bereaved, such as holidays and anniversaries, as they tend to reawaken grief. Be sensitive on these occasions and let your loved one know that you're there for whatever he or she needs.
5. **Watch For Warning Signs.** Try not to overreact if your loved one appears depressed or a little "crazy" for a while, as this is normal. However, if the symptoms of grief do not gradually fade over time (especially after the first two months), encourage him or her to seek professional help. Some warning signs may include: difficulty functioning in daily life, extreme focus on the death, excessive anger or guilt, neglecting personal hygiene, alcohol or drug abuse, hallucinations, withdrawing from others, or, most crucially, talking about dying or suicide.