



Jersey Hospice Care
your care, your choice, your time

What to say and how to comfort others through bereavement, grief, and loss

There are some things you can say depending on whom you are saying it to. When in the position of wanting to help others, often our first desire is to try to “fix” the situation. Often, we mean no harm in fact, we mean just the opposite, we were trying to comfort.

Knowing the right thing to say is only half of the responsibility of being a supportive emotional caregiver.

- **Acknowledge the situation.** For example, you could say something as simple as: "I heard that your father died." By using the word "**died**" you'll show that you're more open to talk about how the grieving person really feels.
- **Express your concern.** For example: "I'm sorry to hear that this happened to you."
- **Let the bereaved talk about how the person has died.** People who are grieving may need to tell the story repeatedly, sometimes in minute detail. Be patient. Repeating the story is a way of processing and accepting the death. With each retelling, the pain lessens. By listening patiently and compassionately, you're helping your loved one heal.
- **Ask how they are feeling.** The emotions of grief can change rapidly so don't assume you know how the bereaved person feels at any given time. If you've gone through a similar loss, share your own experience, only if you are sure, it would be helpful. Remember, though, that grief is an intensely individual experience. No two people experience it the same way, so don't claim to “know” what the person is feeling or compare your grief to theirs. Again, put the emphasis on listening instead, and ask them to tell you how *they're* feeling.
- **Accept their feelings.** Let the grieving person know that it's okay to cry in front of you, to get angry, or to break down. Don't try to reason with them over how they should or shouldn't feel. Grief is a highly emotional experience, so the bereaved need to feel free to express their feelings—no matter how irrational—without fear of judgment, argument, or criticism.
- **Be genuine in your communication.** Don't try to minimize their loss, provide simplistic solutions, or offer unsolicited advice. It's far better to just listen or simply admit: "I'm not sure what to say, but I want you to know I care/her to listen."
- **Be willing to sit in silence.** Don't press if the grieving person doesn't feel like talking. Often, comfort for them comes from simply being in your company. If you can't think

of something to say, just offer eye contact, a squeeze of the hand, or a reassuring hug.

- **Offer your support.** Ask what you can do for the grieving person. Offer to help with a specific task, such as making phone calls, shopping, collecting items or just be there to hang out with or as a shoulder to cry on.

Below are some examples of helpful things to say depending on who they might be to you.

- “Do you feel like talking?” you are letting them know that you are available to listen.
- “I cannot imagine what you must going through.”
- “I wish had the right words; just know I am thinking of you.”
- “I do not know how you feel, but I am here to help in any way I can.”
- “You and your loved one will be in my thoughts and prayers.”
- “I am always just a phone call away, if you need to talk.”
- Offer to help with practical things, food shopping etc..
- “I am here for you”.
- “I am usually up early or late, if you need anything”.
- If appropriate, give a hug instead of saying something.
- Saying nothing, just be with the person is ok too.