

## Supporting Someone Who is Grieving

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Grief is a normal reaction to any change and or loss in life. Everyone goes through a loss or change at some time in their lives. People who are grieving may not just be dealing with the loss of their loved one, but also coping and adjusting to secondary loss which often comes with the death of a loved one.

Examples of secondary loss may include:

- Companionship
- Hopes
- Dreams
- Plans
- Income
- Shared home chores
- Childcare and/or eldercare
- Social and leisure activities
- Managing/keeping the family home
- Retirement
- Vacation plans

In addition to dealing with legal and financial matters after a loved one's death, someone who is grieving may be adjusting to new roles and responsibilities.

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**This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.**

Grief is not just an emotional reaction, it can affect the mental, physical, social, and spiritual areas of a person's life. People who are grieving may have the following:

- Emotional ups and downs or a wide range of feelings that can be sudden and intense
- Difficult images and memories
- Changes with appetite and sleeping patterns
- Hard time concentrating, focusing or problem-solving
- Tired and overwhelmed
- Feel vulnerable and lost without their loved one
- Lack of interest in their normal activities
- A sense of loss of their purpose in life
- Changes in self-identity and spiritual views

Dealing with the loss of a loved one takes more time and energy than most people think. Grief is a normal reaction to loss, and although loss and grief are common experiences, the grief process and timetable is unique for each person.

### How can you help?

- **Listen without judgement** and know that a grieving person may have intense emotions that can feel overwhelming to them at times.
- **Do not share unhelpful comments** to explain the loss such as “He is in a better place.”, “It was God’s plan.”, “You’re young.”, or “You’ll get married again.”
- **Offer to help with tasks or errands** that you can complete. Prepare meals, do laundry, home chores or lawncare, offer to help with child/elder care, phone calls, transportation, or grocery shopping.
- **Respect** the person’s spiritual, cultural, family, and individual rituals and their traditions to honor a deceased person’s life.
- **Be compassionate and offer ongoing support** such as phone calls, visits, invitations to activities, or help them reconnect with friends and family members, and support them when they return to work or church. Even if a grieving person turns down your offers, keep the lines of communication open and be available when they feel ready to re-engage.

- **Remember your grieving family members/friends** and continue to offer comfort and ongoing support in the months after their loss. As time goes by, someone who has had a loss may feel lonely and forgotten as others return to their regular routines. Remember important dates such as birthdays, holidays, anniversaries, and other special occasions which can be very hard for a grieving person.
- **Talk** with a grieving person about their loss. Sharing positive memories about their loved one can be meaningful and healing for someone who is grieving.
- **Encourage** them to ease back into activities and routines. It will not be just one thing, but rather a wide range of coping strategies that will help them manage and adjust to their loss.
- **Be patient** as they learn to deal with reminders that trigger their grief. Reminders such as a song, birthday, their loved one's personal belongings, favorite restaurant and pictures may be very painful after a recent loss. As time goes on, these reminders can become very touching memories.
- **Do not pressure** a grieving person/family about caring for the personal belongings of their loved one who died or making any important decisions when their grief is new. Personal belongings can have important meaning and memories for the grieving person/family. Give them time to adjust and feel more emotionally settled before talking about these types of decisions.
- **Professional support** may be needed after a loss. Professionals who may be helpful to someone who has lost a loved one include: funeral home directors, spiritual/religious leaders, health care providers, mental health professionals, lawyers, accountants, and financial advisors.
- **Reassure and offer hope** to grieving friends and family members. In time, they will feel less sorrow and stronger as they heal and adjust to living without their loved one.