

Four ways to support those who are grieving



1. It's OK to admit you don't know what to say

The culture of much of the Western world actively avoids talking about death – even though it's something we will all have in common one day!

Grief is lonely and many of those going through loss can feel very isolated, especially if others act awkward or avoid them.

A simple way to help is by being present. Even if we don't know what to say.

As Christians, we might feel tempted to find an encouraging bible verse or bring in our theological thoughts on heaven and the afterlife.

Truthfully, rarely can a response (even one theologically sound) take away any hurt or pain.

But we can empathise and be vulnerable together – one open with the loss of their loved one and the other open in their ability to feel with the other.

Sitting together, even in silence, builds connection which in turn goes a long way to diminishing loneliness.



2. Say their name

Sometimes, we might be scared of upsetting those who are grieving, and so avoid talking about the person who has died.

But this might come across as ignoring the person's loss which can add to their hurt.

One of the common points of feedback we get from bereaved parents and widows is that they appreciate when their loved one is spoken of.

For a brief moment, those fond memories can give those grieving an opportunity to verbalise their many thoughts of their missing loved one.

You may not realise it, but those grieving think about the person they have lost almost every day. By saying their name, acknowledging a milestone, remembering a birthday or even asking about a memory, we can give them another opportunity to continue their healing journey.

You never know, you might be the breath of fresh air they longed for that day.



3. Provide ongoing support

The Christian community is usually excellent at banding together in the immediacy of a traumatic event.

But there is no set time frame for grieving, so being there for them, not just in the immediate aftermath, but for the long haul is so important.

After the weeks and months have passed, is often when the adrenalin fades and grief hits in a whole new unexpected way.

Life does not go 'back to normal' for those who have experienced loss. Instead, they can begin to realise even more acutely the hole their loved one has left.

So, do continue to invite them out to social gatherings or check in at times in the year when families typically spend time together.

Reaching out like this goes a long way and honestly speaks volumes.

4. Questions of faith

It is natural for those who are experiencing loss to question their faith. They might ask themselves 'Why did God let this happen? Does he even care?'

As the supporting leader or friend, these questions shouldn't worry you, they are a normal response to loss especially if that loss was unexpected or traumatic.

The Bible is filled with comforting verses and promises for people to lean on, but well-meaning statements such as, 'They are in a better place', or 'Everything happens for a reason' can sometimes be unhelpful.

John Wyatt helpfully said, 'Suffering is not a question which demands an answer, it is not a problem which requires a solution, it is a mystery which demands a presence.'

He likely meant your presence, as the supportive friend, but for Christians we know this also includes God's presence.

When it comes to the complexities of loss, some of the answers we long to give may not be found this side of Heaven. But we know a God who comforts and His promise to comfort those grieving is true. Even if it's difficult to share this with them, we can pray this for them.



(This article was produced by Care for the Family and distributed by email)