

Further information

Dying Matters aims to raise public awareness about the importance of talking more openly about dying, death and bereavement and of making your wishes known.

www.dyingmatters.org 0800 021 44 66

Cruse Bereavement Care provides support, advice and information to children, young people and adults when someone dies.

www.cruse.org.uk 0844 477 9400

The Compassionate Friends is a charitable organisation of bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents dedicated to the support and care of other bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents who have suffered the death of a child/children.

www.tcf.org.uk 0845 123 2304

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to everyone who shared their experiences of bereavement, including members of the National Council for Palliative Care's People in Partnership Group.

Thanks also to The Compassionate Friends for permission to adapt some of their material and to Cruse Bereavement Care and the National Bereavement Alliance for their input and support.

"I still remember people crossing the road rather than speak to me"

I just didn't know what to say or do...

Someone you know has been bereaved. What can you do to support them and show that you are there? You want to help but you just don't know where to start and are terrified of putting your foot in it and making things worse...

To find local and national organisations offering help in your area visit:
www.help.dyingmatters.org

Dying Matters

Let's talk about it

To find out more about Dying Matters visit
www.dyingmatters.org

or call freephone
0800 021 44 66

Find us on Facebook and on Twitter @DyingMatters

This is number twelve in a series of leaflets produced by the Dying Matters Coalition which aims to raise public awareness of the importance of talking more openly about dying, death and bereavement and of making your wishes known.

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR PALLIATIVE CARE

The Dying Matters Coalition is led by the National Council for Palliative Care, the umbrella charity for palliative, end of life and hospice care in England, Wales & Northern Ireland.
www.ncpc.org.uk
Registered Charity no.1005671

Being there



#12

Top tips for what to say and do when someone has been bereaved

Dying Matters

Let's talk about it

Being there for people who have been bereaved

It can be very difficult to know what to say or do when someone you know has lost someone close.

We often long to be there and offer support. However, it can be hard to know what to say for fear of being intrusive, saying the wrong thing or just not feeling able to cope with the sadness. Many of us also find it difficult to overcome our reluctance to talk about dying, death and bereavement.

We can therefore end up terrified of making things more difficult or painful. So we find ourselves saying nothing, saying something careless without meaning to, or even avoiding the person.

Grief affects people in different ways and at different times, so there are no hard and fast rules for what to say and what not to. But we hope that these suggestions, all from people who have lost a loved one, will help you to feel more able to be there for those who have been bereaved.



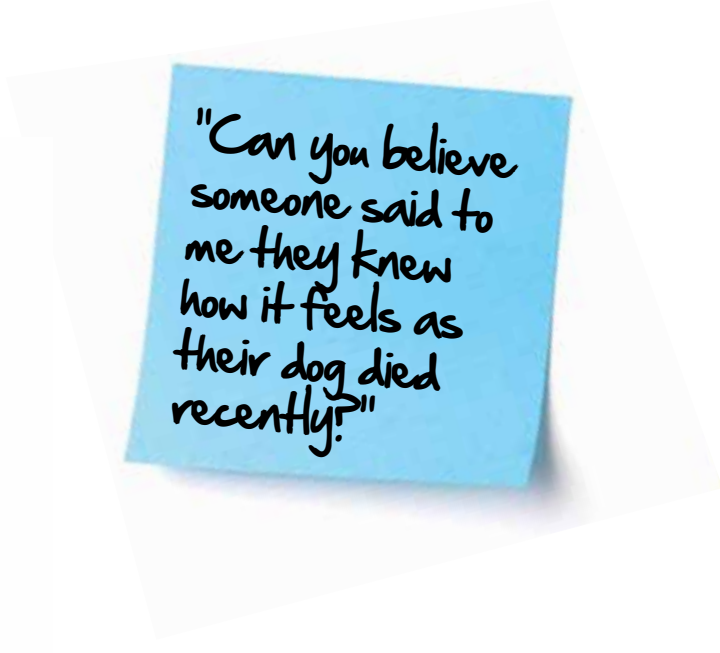
What to expect and where to start

Even though everyone is different, people often experience a baffling and overwhelming range of emotions when someone dies, such as feelings of sadness, fear, guilt, anger and exhaustion. It is not uncommon for people to feel completely numb. They can also feel relieved at the end of suffering, liberated from a burden lifted or thankful for the person's life and the care received.

Whilst it can be hard to imagine how someone may be feeling, being aware that there may be many conflicting and confusing emotions around may help you to respond more sensitively, especially when talking to children.

It's also important to be aware that there is no right or wrong way to grieve and everyone can react differently.

You can't take away someone's pain. Grief can't be stopped on demand – it can only be supported. Contributors to this leaflet made the following practical suggestions.



Top suggestions of things to say and do

"Mention their bereavement the first time you see someone. Many people are so uncomfortable talking about your loss they say nothing."

"Think before you speak but try not to be so inhibited that you avoid the subject altogether. It's ok to admit that you're lost for words."

"Practical offers can be more helpful than 'is there anything I can do?'. For example, providing meals, helping with household chores or offering to look after children can be invaluable."



"Go the extra mile to keep in regular contact and make a special effort to check in with people in the weeks and months after the funeral, as these can be some of the most difficult and loneliest times."

"Remember that certain times of the year such as birthdays, anniversaries of a death, Christmas and other holiday times and New Year may be especially difficult. Try to remember these times and send a card or drop people a line."

"Do talk about and mention the person who has died – unless whoever has been bereaved has said that they don't feel ready to talk about them."

"Phone people and invite them to join in social activities. Be understanding if they don't want to join you, but continue to offer as at some stage they may be really grateful that you asked."

"Be patient and try to resist the urge to fill every silence."

What not to say and do

"Don't avoid someone who has been bereaved – it's always better to be there and to show you care, even if you aren't sure what to say or do."

"Don't say you know how they feel. Even if you've been through something similar, it's unlikely you'll be able to understand exactly how they're feeling."

"Avoid platitudes such as 'time is a great healer' or 'everything happens for a reason'. Phrases like this can make it feel as though you're brushing their grief under the carpet or minimising the loss."

"Don't act as if nothing has happened or avoid talking about the person who has died. It can be painful when people act as though the person who died never existed."

"If you have a faith, be careful how you express it to other people. They might not find it comforting or helpful to be told, for example, that 'he or she is in a better place'."

"By all means acknowledge your sadness but be careful not to make conversations all about you and how difficult you're finding it."

"Don't assume that because someone seems to be coping they are or that they don't need your help."

"Don't say anything that suggests the bereaved person is grieving incorrectly – such as telling them to pull themselves together or that they should be over it by now, or more or less upset."

