

How to support a friend or relative through their grief.

During this time of the Covid-19 virus more people than usual will need support. The suggestions given below are still relevant, but may need to be modified to comply with any current regulations. Please be aware and keep both yourself and your friend or relative safe.

Supporting someone through grief is not an easy path to travel. They will be going through so many emotions, feelings and changes of mood, that you may think you barely know them at all. It is essential to recognise that it is the grief and not the person that you are witnessing, hold the memories of your friendship in your heart, they will come back in time.

What can I do to help?

A lot of people find it very difficult to know what to say, how to start a conversation with someone who is grieving. Afraid of saying the wrong thing, saying too much or not enough and often end up saying nothing at all. A few kind words are all that's needed in the early stages to let the grieving person know that someone cares. Something like "is there anything I can do to help" or "I was really sorry to hear of your loss, if there's anything I can do for you please let me know" will let the grieving person know that someone is thinking of them and while they may say no initially, it leaves it open for them to contact you again later.

If they do initiate a conversation, allow them the time and opportunity to let you know how they are feeling or what they really need. Don't be tempted to rush in and try to fix things, it's unlikely that you can. Just be attentive and give them the space to express themselves and feel heard. Also let them know you are happy to listen whenever they want to talk.

They may want to talk about their loved one or they may not. Don't be surprised to experience a range of emotions, anger guilt, regret and obviously sadness. You may also find that some memories become distorted due to the mixed emotions of their grief, but they will return in time.

Don't be tempted to argue with anything they get wrong, remain calm and supportive at all times.

Random acts of kindness

It always feels good when someone does something kind without being asked. It doesn't have to be a big thing, but it's good if it works on their senses as this will help to calm the mixed emotions they are feeling.

Taste – Bake them a cake or pie, or maybe some home-made soup, shop bought is good, but home-made means so much more

Smell – Scented candles, diffusers, a house plant or maybe a nice bath oil or shower gel.

Touch – A soft comfort blanket, personalised pillow, or even a cuddly toy.

Sight – A thoughtful card, a DVD of a favourite series, a plant for the garden, books or magazines.

Sound – Music CD, windchimes, talking book.

Any of these things and more can be dropped round at random, even left outside in a porch anonymously, but will mean so much, be creative, but thoughtful.

Practicalities

If they have any pets, check that they are ok, offer to take the dog for a walk, together or alone. Do they need any petfood?

If it is someone that doesn't drive (or maybe feels nervous on their own), offer to take them shopping, to appointments or go with them in their own car.

Offer to cut the lawn, sweep the drive, put the bins out, even clean or help them to clean the house.

Ask if they would like you to arrange any deliveries, milk, papers etc.

Offer to cook dinner one evening, it's a good way to find out if they are looking after themselves properly.

Ask if they would like to go for a walk, the park or a local beauty spot – nature is a wonderful tonic. Maybe even take a small picnic.

Don't worry if sometimes you don't get it right, most of the time you will!

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