



Alberni Valley Hospice Society Bereavement Services

- Contact by phone or in person with a trained Bereavement Counselor
- Bereavement Walking Group
- Bereavement Support Group
- AVHS Library resources

Often family and friends will feel uncertain as to what they can do or say when someone is grieving.

They want to offer comfort and support, but will hesitate or avoid contact for fear of doing or saying the "wrong" thing.

It is normal to feel awkward but it is important to always venture; to acknowledge the loss and offer opportunities for conversation.

In fact, the simple communication of the feeling of caring is probably the most important and helpful thing anyone can do.

These suggestions will guide you in communicating that care.



For information on bereavement services contact:

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“Is there anything I can do to help?”

**Suggestions for the friends
and relatives of a grieving survivor**

Get in touch as soon after the loss as possible.

Send a sympathy card with a personal note or phone and speak either to the mourner or to someone close and ask when you can visit and how you might help. Even if much time has passed, it's never too late to express your concern.

A simple, "I'm sorry"

This can convey your empathy and show your genuine concern. Say you are sorry to hear of the death, mention the person by name and be willing to listen to what the bereaved person may say. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Be available and consistent.

Taking the initiative to reach out by making regularly spaced contacts will be appreciated. Many bereaved people find it hard to ask for support or are concerned with being a burden.

Avoid cliches and easy answers.

Comments like "He is out of pain", "Aren't you lucky that...", "It's God's will", do not help, and will only alienate the bereaved.

Do not to tell the bereaved how he or she feels.

You can ask (without probing), but you cannot know, except as you are told. Your attempts to do so will be resented. To say, for example, "You must feel relieved now that he is out of pain," is presumptuous. Even to say, "I know just how you feel," is questionable.

Respect and validate the feelings that are shared.

Don't try to "fix" these feelings or give advice, "You shouldn't feel guilty, or angry or...". These statements tend to discount the person's real feelings and isolate that person further. Difficult feelings are a normal, healthy part of grief and they need to be expressed and accepted. Accept your own helpless feelings in not being able to fix the situation.

Be a good listener and be patient.

When suffering spills over into words, you can do the one thing the bereaved needs above all else - you can listen and be patient. Grieving takes a lot of time and never entirely goes away. Allowing the bereaved to repeat their story, again and again, helps them process their thoughts and feelings in an attempt to come to some understanding of what has happened.

Accept silence.

If the bereaved doesn't feel like talking, don't force conversation or try to distract them by talking about trivia. Learn to be comfortable with silence.

Try a caring touch of the hand.

Get good information about grief.

This will help you understand the normal responses and phases of grief. Grief is a normal response to death and is necessary in order to adjust to life without the person who died. Make use of the public or hospice library.

Allow the "working through" of grief.

Do not whisk away clothing or hide pictures. Do not criticize seemingly morbid behaviour. Young people may repeatedly visit the site of the fatal acci-



dent. A widow may sleep with her husband's pajamas as a pillow. A young child may wear his dead sibling's clothing. All of these are normal behaviours.

Remember there is no right way to grieve.

How a person grieves depends on their relationship with the deceased, their personal coping skills, and the amount of social support they have to sustain them through the process. If you become concerned, encourage the bereaved to take care of themselves by getting help from their minister, doctor, or a grief counselor.

Encourage others to visit or help.

Usually after the first visit the discomfort dissipates and it becomes easier to offer further support. Try scheduling visitors, so that everyone does not come at once in the beginning and fails to come at all later on.

Be aware of grieving children in the family.

Do not assume that a seemingly calm child or conversely an acting out child, is not grieving. If you can, be a friend to whom feelings can be confided and with whom tears can be shed. In most cases, children should be left in the home. Children learn how to grieve by observing adult examples.

Encourage the postponement of major decisions.

What ever can wait should wait until after the period of intense grief.

In time, gently invite the bereaved to quiet outside activity.

They may lack the initiative to go out on their own. Encourage their growing independence. When the bereaved returns to social activity, treat him/her as a normal person. Include them in social gatherings. Acknowledge the loss, the change in their life, but don't dwell on it.

Offer to attend to practical matters:

Early in the days after the death:

- help with answering the phone
- make lists of what needs to be done
- bring a meal
- do errands and shopping
- take care of the children
- act as chauffeur for appointments

In the months following the death:

- bring and share a meal
- help with gardening or household maintenance
- go for a walk together
- offer to make holiday baking
- remember anniversaries, birthdays and holidays
- continue to remember the person who died and to talk about them

Material adapted from works by Amy Hillyard Jensen