

## How to help a friend who has lost someone

- Don't avoid them because you're feeling uncomfortable.  
Don't change the subject when they bring up the person who died.  
Don't avoid mentioning their loss out of fear of reminding them: they haven't forgotten it.
- Act as naturally as possible but do not pretend that nothing has happened.
- Listen with full attention.
- Say you are sorry about what happened and about their pain.  
Don't try to find something positive or a moral lesson out of what's happened.
- Encourage them to be patient with themselves and not to expect too much of themselves or impose any 'shoulds' on themselves.
- Don't assume you know what they're feeling. You can say, 'I don't know how you must be feeling. Can you tell me how things are for you?'
- Keep confidentiality.
- Talk about the dead person and remember what the person was like and the things they used to do.
- Talking about your own feelings or experiences can help if they are shared with the intention of helping the person who is talking. They are unhelpful if your intention is to make them think or feel in a particular way that they may not choose for themselves.
- Just being with someone can help.
- Someone who is grieving may suddenly burst into tears. Try to be comfortable with this.
- If you feel like crying too, that's all right.
- Don't worry if the person wants to be alone. Don't impose and make them talk if they don't want to. Respect their need for privacy.
- Be realistic about how much you can help. It's important to recognise the limitations of what you can offer. We can't take someone's pain away.

## How to help your son or daughter when they have lost someone

Your son or daughter's initial reaction, which may go on for a couple of weeks, can be shock and disbelief- a feeling that it hasn't really happened. It's very hard to believe that someone has died. Your son or daughter may feel numb and dazed, dreamy and cut off from what is going on around them, going through the day on 'auto pilot'. They may go very quiet and not want to speak to anyone. They may have times when they feel anxious and panicky, less confident about the predictability and safety of the world and need to check that everyone in your family is alright.

You also need to be aware that it will be difficult for your son or daughter to concentrate. They may be forgetful and not remember what they are supposed to be doing. Their energy levels are likely to be reduced and they'll be feeling tired especially if they aren't sleeping well. They can worry that they cannot give as much as might be expected at school and with coursework. They may seem irritable and have arguments with friends and family members. Your son or daughter may feel that too little or the wrong things are being offered.

This will be followed by a stage where your son or daughter gradually realises what it means to have lost someone they care about. This growing awareness can trigger a number of complex and conflicting emotions including anger, guilt and emptiness. They may vary in intensity according to circumstance.

Remember that they are feeling intense feelings which they are not used to feeling or have never felt before.

With this in mind, here are some suggestions for how you can be supportive.

- Don't pretend that nothing has happened.
- Don't assume you know what they're feeling. You can say, 'I don't know how you must be feeling. Can you tell me how things are for you?'
- Don't change the subject when they bring up the person who died.  
Listen with full attention.  
Let them express their feelings. Receive their feelings received without judgement.  
Keep confidentiality.
- Say you are sorry about what happened and about their distress.  
Acknowledge in words and actions what has happened to them.  
Don't try to find something positive or a moral lesson out of what's happened.
- Encourage them to be patient with themselves and not to expect too much of themselves or impose any 'shoulds' on themselves. This is a helpful way for all family members to be too.
- Talking about your own feelings or experiences can help if they are shared with the intention of helping your son or daughter. They are unhelpful if your intention is to make them think or feel in a particular way that they may not choose for themselves.
- If you feel like crying too, that's all right. Be a good role model and make it clear that they can show their feelings openly.
- Be available as and when they are ready.  
Support and encourage talking but don't force it. Don't impose and make them talk if they don't want to.  
Don't worry if your son or daughter wants to be alone.  
Remember they may prefer to do most of their talking with their friends.  
Respect their need for privacy.
- Don't avoid mentioning their loss out of fear of reminding them: they haven't forgotten it.  
Talk about the dead person and remember what the person was like and the things they used to do.  
Don't worry that in doing this you will make things worse.
- Be realistic about how much you can help. It's important to recognise the limitations of what you can offer. We can't take someone's pain away.