



GRIEF SUPPORT RESOURCE

BRIDGING THE GRIEF GAP

HOW TO FEEL SUPPORTED OR
GIVE SUPPORT WHILE GRIEVING

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Hello, **I'M NATHALIE**

I am a passionate writer, holistic counselor, coach, and mother.

My areas of specialty are relationships, grief, and trauma.

I have independently authored and published various grief resource books.

You can find them [here](#) on my website.

In my role as a therapist, I love to help people find their inspiration for a better life, be that through healing from trauma or finding ways for healthy grieving.

I'm sure this guide will help you understand your grief and grief support.



You can find out more about me [here](#), on my website.

Nathalie

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INTRODUCTION

GOOD GRIEF SUPPORT AND HEALTHY GRIEVING IS A RESULT OF MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING.

“As I interacted with all those involved, I realized many problems complicating the grieving process develop because of the basic lack of understanding of grief and the resulting unintended and often unrecognized misunderstandings between the bereaved and their support network.”

This is completely normal. Bereaved people are in extreme emotional upheaval during their acute grief and don't have the energy to educate those around them. Supporters, aware of the intensity, are hesitant to clarify and bring up a topic due to the sensitivity of the situation and the emotional state of the bereaved. Everyone intends well, yet unintended miscommunication rules the day.

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SUGGESTIONS FOR SUPPORTERS:

HEALTHY GRIEVING COMES FROM SKILLED GRIEF SUPPORT.

- 1** As a supporter, expect the bereaved to act differently from how they would normally. It is very common, especially in the acute grief phase, that they respond more sensitively to anything happening around them.

REMEMBER: It is normal that the bereaved person experiences all kinds of emotional reactions, even contradictory ones at the same time. Emotional reactions are just one way in which grief may be expressed.

- 2** As a supporter, you can be of tremendous help in listening to the bereaved express themselves. Listening is one of the most important skills you can have and how well you listen has a major effect on the quality of your supporting. Read the chapter on “Active listening” in the book ***Bridging the Grief Gap*** to get some more valuable input.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SUPPORTERS:

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It is important to neither impose your beliefs on them nor try to ease their pain with unhelpful spiritual clichés like: “Your child was so special that God called her to be with Him” or “at least he had a good life and no longer needs to suffer in Heaven.” What people believe and practice in one moment in time can and will change, especially as an effect of bereavement.

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Never rush the bereaved in the process of grieving and healing. Allow them their time to deal with the loss and their integration back into life.

REMEMBER: In answer to the question ‘how long will my grief last’, we have to look at our own situation. Comparing our loss to any other person’s loss does not help.

Each person’s grief is as unique as their fingerprint. Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SUPPORTERS:

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Expectations that the griever will at some future time be finished with the grieving are unhelpful and puts pressure on them. “Words such as ‘closure’ and ‘getting over grief’ may evoke anger and hostility,” says Karen Carney from Psych Central.

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As a support person there are five issues of concern in regards to cultural sensitivity:

- What are the bereaved family’s beliefs surrounding death?
- Who is expected to attend the mourning ceremonies and how are they expected to dress and act?
- What special days or dates will be significant for the bereaved family?
- What types of verbal and written condolences are expressed?
- What kinds of gifts or flowers are expected?
- What emotions and behaviours are accepted as normal grief responses within the person’s own culture?

Ask someone who shares the cultural background with the bereaved when supporting them.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SUPPORTERS:

7 Encourage the griever by pointing out their resilience already present without pushing them by implying they need to change. This is one of your challenges in becoming a quality supporter!

8 Grief-triggers are important to know about because they influence the bereaved's emotional state significantly. Make sure you talk about and remember the grief-triggers of the person you're supporting.

For grievers, there is often nothing more comforting than being able to share and reminisce with someone so make sure you listen attentively.

Note: Supporters be aware of your own grief-triggers – please read the chapter called “Supporters’ grief-triggers” in the book ***Bridging the Grief Gap*** to get some more valuable input.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SUPPORTERS:

- 9** Quality supporting in grief needs to be practiced like a skill. It's something that can be learned; therefore, you can become a great supporter, if you want to. Part of this is knowing yourself: your own triggers, your automatic reactions to intense emotions, your own history with grief, and, most of all, how you deal with all of those.
- 10** Whatever you do or say, remember these things: Acknowledge the griever and their pain. Listen to them but do not try to fix them. Be encouraging and give them hope.
- 11** Find out what they need by asking them.
- 12** Ask 'how are you today?' which is a really short way to express empathy without overwhelming the bereaved.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SUPPORTERS:

- 13** When in doubt, ask the bereaved a question, rather than telling them what to do or think. Trust that the griever is doing the best they can given the circumstances they are currently facing.
- 14** Generally, any statement made about grief is dependent on who says it, when they say it, and to whom. When the griever speaks a sentence, applying it to themselves, it has a completely different meaning than if someone surrounding them says it to them. (See the chapter called “Circles of support” in the book ***Bridging the Grief Gap*** for more explanation.)
- 15** You must be open to grievers teaching you about their perspective. You must be open to learning to understand the language of the bereaved. Even though every bereaved once was a non-bereaved person does not mean they were or are fluent in the language of support.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SUPPORTERS:

- 16** One very clear and obvious support that the bereaved in the survey I conducted mentioned, besides counseling, was friends and family talking to them. If you are a support person, be sure to keep the conversation going. Ask them questions and check whether they would like your support or if they need alone time, which is okay too.
- 17** Both grievors and supporters are all dealing with a challenging situation, we are just in different roles.
- 18** As a supporter, you can be sure that the bereaved want you to understand, to learn their language. They do however not always have the energy to teach you; neither is it their job to do so. If you want to learn, ask questions, be prepared to do it wrong but do not easily give up on the bereaved. It might be a difficult language (or a difficult situation) but the impact you can have when speaking their language is worth it. Stay with it.

SUGGESTIONS FOR BEREAVED:

GRIEVING IS NOT THE PROBLEM; IT IS THE SOLUTION.

- 1** If you, as the bereaved person, do not recognize yourself or understand why you react differently from your usual way, know that this is normal given the circumstances.

REMEMBER: It is normal to experience all kinds of emotional reactions, even contradictory ones at the same time. Emotional reactions are just one way in which grief may be expressed.
- 2** If you experience physical ailments as you grieve, get them checked out to exclude any other potential causes.

REMEMBER: Exercise is a good way to deal with stress and the physical reactions to grief.

SUGGESTIONS FOR BEREAVED:

- 3** Talking, whether done with a partner, a friend, or a family member, or with a professional is helpful in reducing obsessive thinking.
- 4** Grief work involves learning to live with and adjusting to the loss. There is no set rule or timeline to follow. According to the American professor of psychology, J. William Worden, there may be a sense that you are never finished with grief, but realistic goals of grief work include regaining an interest in life and feeling hopeful again.
- 5** No matter what norms your culture dictates regarding grief, you need to grieve in your own way and in the way that feels right to you. Remember, there is not one correct way to grieve.

SUGGESTIONS FOR BEREAVED:

- 6 Finding the right support person who is sensitive to such triggers can make a real difference to the way you cope with them.
- 7 One of the toughest additional challenges for you will be to forgive those who are not good firefighters or builders. They might fail at one or both of those roles. You can find out about those types of supporters in the book *Bridging the Grief Gap*.
- 8 Look out for the friends and family member(s) that you feel supported by. Ask them for specific help. Ask a supporter to help you make a list of things that you can and want to delegate. You will find there are those gems among your friends and family who are organizing geniuses. Most of all, if they feel helpful, give them something to do that is worthwhile for you.

SUGGESTIONS FOR BEREAVED:

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Ask for what you need.

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I recommend you envisage the supporters doing the best they can with the resources they have available. They want to support the bereaved but are also caught by the intensity of this situation leading to insecurity or questioning themselves.

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There is no easy suggestion to deal with the secondary losses, especially when they are friends and family members. The first step is to recognize and acknowledge these losses and their impact. One helpful way to deal with those losses is to talk to other grievors experiencing similar situations. Find a support group, either in person or online, and express your feelings to others who have experienced what you have. You will find that the members will express their understanding empathetically and with compassion.

SUGGESTIONS FOR BEREAVED:

12 From what bereaved parents have shared with me, it is important to find suitable formal help, for example, from social workers, therapists, coaches, or doctors. If the person assigned to you is not suited to you, ask for someone else or find alternatives through hospital staff, counselors, etc. or ask someone you know for a recommendation.

13 We, both grievors and supporters, are all dealing with a challenging situation, we are just in different roles.

14 If you want to truly be supported, you need to support your supporter in being able to learn your language so they can improve in their supporting role.

Remember: Even though every bereaved once was a non-bereaved person does not mean they were or are fluent in support-ish.

SUGGESTIONS FOR BEREAVED:

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You might remember, if you have come in contact with someone facing a significant loss before you yourself had experienced your loss, how helpless you felt in saying or doing the right thing. You might have anxiously sat in the church or waiting in line to share condolences. You thought about what to write in the condolence card. You wondered how to interact with your ex-colleague after they were made redundant from their job or your sister-in-law after the divorce from your brother. Take that fact into consideration when cutting supporters, who struggle to learn your language, some slack.

YOUR TAKE-AWAY:

IF I REMEMBER ONE THING, IT WILL BE...

“We, both grievors and supporters, are all dealing with a challenging situation, we are just in different roles.”

Let's help each other in reaching a better, mutual understanding to support healthy grieving and healing.

MORE RESOURCES

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

You can find more resources on my website, whether you are bereaved or in a supporting role.

Stay in touch



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