

Grief Education Series



Supporting Someone Who is Grieving

The experience of grief can be challenging, and when you are witnessing someone you love who is grieving, it can be difficult to know how to care for and support them.

These are some things to remember:

- ✦ There is no cure for grief. Grief must be experienced and the person who is grieving has to do the “work of grief”.
- ✦ Grief must be witnessed. The individual who can journey alongside someone in grief provides a special gift. If you are a witness to someone’s grief, you may find this challenging but your support is essential.
- ✦ Grief is a process. It is ever changing and is not something that can be fixed. As you support your grieving person, give them the space to be what they need to be, to experience what they need to experience, and help them with rebuilding their world.
- ✦ Grievers need to know their loved one is remembered. Say the loved one’s name. The person who is grieving will be thinking of their loved one, whether or not you mention their name. Often the grieving person enjoys hearing their loved one’s name, memories shared, and the feelings others have regarding their loved one.
- ✦ Grievers need to be supported in their grief. We have heard grievers say that they appreciate it when family or friends are specific in what kind of support they are offering. We often say to someone who is grieving, “Call me if you need something” but even the task of calling can be overwhelming.
- ✦ Make concrete commitments, ie. “I will be over to mow the lawn on Saturday” or “I can pick up the paperwork for you” are a great way to support the grieving individual. In addition, providing a meal, bringing flowers, or other simple gestures can be helpful.
- ✦ When greeting someone who is grieving, avoid the phrase, “How are you?” Use phrases like, “What are things like for you today?”, “How are you feeling today?” or “What are some things you need to get done today that I can help you with?”
- ✦ Avoid offering platitudes like, “Your loved one is in a better place” or “Time heals all wounds”. This can feel dismissive to the person who is grieving. Additionally, unless you positively know the belief system of the person you are supporting, your words could be damaging, even if that wasn’t the intention.



Your ANCORA Social Services/Bereavement Team is available to support you in your grief process. Please reach out to them with any questions or concerns at 208-452-2672.

All of our best advice for supporting someone who is grieving can be summed up in the following three tasks:

Listen - It is essential that those helping a grieving person provide presence and a listening ear. Telling and retelling of the grief story has been shown to help griever work through the feelings that surround the death. Resist the urge to offer advice, unless specifically asked for it.

Encourage - Along with supporting those in grief, it is essential that we encourage them to continue to do the things they have enjoyed. Adapting to life without our loved ones is a task that is vital for future health. This can be approached carefully by asking the grieving person about their hopes for the future and giving them permission to think about moving forward in life. The language “moving forward” versus “moving on” is often more appropriate in this situation.

Validate - All feelings are acceptable; anger, guilt, fear, sadness, joy, relief, confusion, etc. As a helper, it is crucial to be able to be present and respond in a non-judgmental manner. One way to do this is to simply listen. You don't have to have the answers to grief so, if you have no response at all, that is okay.

Providing your care, support, and acceptance is your task as you help someone who is grieving. Of course, your **Ancora Health Services Medical Social Services Team** is available to support you with any grief related questions.

Grief is a normal reaction that can be experienced with different types of loss:

- ☐ death/divorce/separation
- ☐ change of a job
- ☐ change of health status
- ☐ loss of relationship

Grief includes all of the feelings that are normally associated with loss:

- ☐ sadness
- ☐ anger
- ☐ fear
- ☐ guilt
- ☐ confusion
- ☐ regret

....and more

A Word About Grieving Styles

Just as there are different types of people, there are different ways that people grieve. Understanding this can help in our goals to support those who are grieving.

Instrumental Grievors

- ♦ grief is experienced more cognitively and physically
- ♦ coined more of a “masculine” style
- ♦ less feeling-based
- ♦ like to do things that are active in order to “work out” their grief
- ♦ focused toward inward reflection
- ♦ working on problem solving to adapt to their new reality

Intuitive Grievors

- ♦ grief is experienced as very intense waves of emotion
- ♦ coined more of a “feminine” style
- ♦ more feeling-based
- ♦ processing and exploring feelings in order to cope with death
- ♦ good candidates for support group because of their desire to “work through” their grief

Adapted from Kenneth Doka and Terry Martin