

RECOVER ARRIVE BECOME

CLINICAL THERAPY PRACTICE

GRIEF & RELATIONSHIPS

HOW TO SHOW UP WHEN NEITHER OF YOU KNOWS WHAT TO SAY

Grief can affect attention, energy, communication, decision-making, and the ability to know or explain what is needed. Support can be concrete, flexible, and low-pressure.

THEY MAY NOT KNOW WHAT THEY NEED

- Grief can make even simple choices feel difficult. A person may genuinely not know whether they want company, quiet, food, conversation, distraction, or help.
- They may want something one day and need the opposite the next.
- Difficulty asserting a need is not the same as rejecting you or the relationship.
- Supporters cannot read minds either. Gentle choices can reduce pressure on both people.

MAKE CONCRETE, LOW-PRESSURE OFFERS

- Instead of "Let me know if you need anything," try: "I am going to the store. Would it help if I dropped off a few things?"
- Instead of "You need to get out," try: "Would company feel helpful today, or would you rather have quiet?"
- Add permission: "You can say no." "No need to respond right away."
- Offer one or two manageable choices rather than a long list of decisions.

WORDS THAT USUALLY HELP

- "I am so sorry."
- "I do not know exactly what this is like for you, but I am here to listen."
- "I remember how much they meant to you."
- "You do not have to be okay with me."
- "I am thinking about you today. No need to respond."
- Use the person's name when the grieving person does; remembering them is not the same as causing the grief.

TRY TO AVOID

- "Everything happens for a reason." "At least..." "They are in a better place."
- "You need to be strong." "You should be over this by now."
- Comparing losses or quickly shifting the conversation to your own experience.
- Pressuring someone to talk, socialize, forgive, find meaning, or make major decisions.
- Taking every delayed text, canceled plan, or quiet period personally.

PRESERVE THE RELATIONSHIP

- Try not to make grief a test of love, loyalty, or friendship.
- Expect that memory, responsiveness, patience, and social energy may be different for a while.
- Keep invitations open without creating guilt: "We would love to see you, and it is completely okay if today is not a good day."
- Check in after the funeral and on ordinary days, not only immediately after the loss.
- Birthdays, holidays, anniversaries, and other reminders may need extra gentleness.

COMPASSION CAN INCLUDE BOUNDARIES

- Grief can explain irritability, withdrawal, or reduced capacity, but it does not require others to accept threats, cruelty, or abuse.
- Try: "I care about you, and I know you are carrying a lot. I also want us to speak without yelling. We can come back to this later."
- Supporters need rest and support too. One person does not have to meet every need.
- If grief is overwhelming, persistent, traumatic, or accompanied by thoughts of suicide, professional or crisis support can help.

Grief changes relationships. Patience, clarity, and small acts of care can help protect them.

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