

# What to say when someone dies

Lots of people worry about saying the wrong thing to someone who is grieving. But it's often better to say something than nothing at all.

- If you are unsure how to start, try telling them how sorry you are to hear the news.
- Don't assume you know how they feel.
- Listening is important. Showing someone you are listening is about making time and space to really hear what the person is telling you, without interruption.
- When offering help, try not to make it too vague - "I can pick the children up from school on Thursday" is better than "let me know if there's anything I can do to help you"



"The worst thing is having to button it all up and not feel free to talk."



The Connecting Communities partnership between Cruse Bereavement Support, Cruse Scotland and Co-op is working to bring communities together to support one another with grief.

For more about how to support someone who is grieving, go to:



For further information visit:  
[coop.co.uk/bereavementhelp](https://coop.co.uk/bereavementhelp)  
[cruse.org.uk](https://cruse.org.uk) | [crusescotland.org.uk](https://crusescotland.org.uk)

"I felt less alone in my grief thanks to people who made time and space for me, without judgement."

Cruse Bereavement Support. Registered charity no. 208078  
Cruse Scotland. Registered charity no. SC031600

With thanks to those who shared their own experiences of grief to help create this leaflet.

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# Supporting someone who is grieving



How to offer help to a friend, family member or colleague after someone dies

working in partnership with:



# How you can help

There are many ways you can help someone to navigate their grief.

Everyone grieves differently so try to be guided by what you know about the person.

Some of the following may help:

- Listen if they would like to talk or be with them if they need company.
- Share memories of the person who died or suggest ways to remember them together.
- Offer practical help with every-day tasks and responsibilities, if they want this.
- Keep in touch as time goes by.

“I’ve never forgotten the acts of kindness. They knew what was needed when I couldn’t even think.”

“Ultimately there is nothing you can say or do that will bring the person back, just being there for them is enough.”



## The grief journey

“Give it time. Grieving doesn’t follow a straight line. Respect that and don’t rush them.”

When supporting someone who is grieving, remember there are no set stages of grief.

### Immediate days...

They may be feeling intense pain or they may be numb or in shock. Everyone’s experiences are unique so try to find out what you can do to help. Practical help may be useful such as informing people or helping with practical arrangements.

### Weeks and months after...

While the early days can include emotions such as shock, a flurry of visitors and working through practical arrangements, often a few weeks or months after can be harder to process. Sometimes people find that support, and visitors, dry up after the funeral has taken place. Try to keep checking in with them and support them to build positive habits.

### A year after...

The first birthdays and anniversaries following a death can be particularly difficult times. Remembering the milestones and helping keep memories alive can be a great comfort.

### Many years after...

Grief can hit someone when they least expect it and there can be many triggers, even years after a death. Mentioning the person’s name shows they are remembered.

“Even when it seems to you that quite a lot of time has passed, it might not feel like that to the person who’s grieving. Keep the person who died in the conversation – they are still so much a part of the grieving person’s life.”

“You can’t pour from an empty cup.”



## Self-care

It’s important to look after yourself, so that you can look after others. Caring for someone can be emotional and draining. Remember to get enough sleep, eat well and find time for yourself. Even a short walk can help.