Helping Someone Who Is Grieving

A Practical Guide for Supporting Someone Through Loss



When someone experiences grief, many people want to help but are unsure what to say or do. Fear of saying the wrong thing often causes people to withdraw entirely, which can unintentionally leave grieving individuals feeling isolated. This guide offers practical ways to support someone through grief with compassion, patience, and emotional presence.

> *"People rarely remember the perfect words. They remember who stayed."*

What Grieving People Often Need Most

Grief affects emotional stability, concentration, energy, relationships, routines, and physical health. While every person grieves differently, many grieving individuals need:

- Consistent emotional support
- Someone willing to listen
- Continued support after the initial shock fades
- Patience without pressure
- Practical help with everyday tasks
- Space to grieve honestly without judgment

What to Say

Supportive communication does not require perfect language. Honest, compassionate presence matters more than polished responses.

Helpful things to say may include:

- "I'm here for you."
- "I don't have the perfect words, but I care about you."
- "How are you doing today, really?"
- "You do not have to go through this alone."
- "Would you like to talk about them?"

What Not to Say

Certain phrases, even when well-intended, can make grieving people feel misunderstood or emotionally dismissed.

Try to avoid phrases like:

- "Everything happens for a reason."
- "You need to stay strong."
- "I know exactly how you feel."
- "At least they lived a long life."
- "They would want you to move on."

Grief is deeply personal, and comparisons can unintentionally minimize someone's pain.

Why Support Often Disappears Too Quickly

Many grieving people receive support immediately after a loss, but that support often fades within weeks. Meanwhile, grief itself may intensify as reality settles in.

One of the most meaningful things someone can do is continue checking in long after the funeral, memorial service, or public attention has ended.

Practical Ways to Help

Support does not always need to be emotional conversation. Practical assistance can reduce stress during overwhelming periods.

Helpful actions may include:

- Bringing meals
- Running errands
- Sitting quietly without forcing conversation
- Offering childcare help
- Sending simple check-in messages
- Remembering important anniversaries and dates

Supporting Someone Through Traumatic Loss

Traumatic grief can involve shock, anxiety, emotional numbness, fear, and intrusive thoughts. People experiencing traumatic loss may struggle to process what happened for a long time.

Patience is extremely important. Healing after traumatic grief is often slower, more complicated, and emotionally exhausting.

A Final Reminder

You do not need perfect words to support someone who is grieving. Compassion, consistency, and willingness to remain present often matter far more than having the “right” response.

Showing up repeatedly can become one of the greatest gifts you offer someone navigating loss.



About Michael Reed

Michael Reed is the author of The Million Stages of Grief, The Million Stages of Healing, and The Owl and the Ladybug. His work focuses on grief education, trauma, emotional resilience, healing, and life after loss.