

## Getting the balance right

People who have been bereaved need support from those close to them, but they may also need space. Be careful not to smother them with your sympathy, or to make them feel powerless in your determination to help them.

No two people are alike in their emotional or practical needs after a death. Sometimes people who have been bereaved feel a need to perform many tasks, or perform certain tasks well, to help them come to terms with what has happened. Sometimes they would prefer to leave practicalities to others.

It's usually a case of being observant, and being there at the right time, rather than taking over. Quite often, the bereaved person is swept along in the eventful days leading up to the funeral – it may be in the days and weeks after that that he or she finds it harder to cope, and your offers of help and company will be most welcome.

## Thinking longer term

Don't feel rebuffed if your offers of support are rejected at first. Try later. People have to live with grief and the consequences of bereavement for months, years. Their needs and feelings change with time - some people have talked of having periods where they feel as if they are going mad. So it's important that they know they can come back to you when and if they need to. Remind them that you're still aware how much life has changed for them.

Through it all, the sense of normality and stability that close friends and family members can provide is important.

## Remember

You can always ask for advice on what to do, or support for yourself, from people you respect and trust, or from a variety of organisations that you can find at [www.goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk](http://www.goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk)

# Someone close to you has been bereaved

**A parent, brother, sister or other relation, or a friend perhaps. You may have been close to the person who has died too, but you're aware that the loss has hit the other person hard. What do you do and say? It's sometimes hard to know - people who have been bereaved often don't cry out for help, even if they sometimes feel like it.**

**To find out how to get more help visit:**  
**[www.goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk](http://www.goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk)**  
**or call 0131 229 0538**



Good Life, Good Death, Good Grief is working to make Scotland a place where there is more openness about death, dying and bereavement so that:

- People are aware of ways to live with death, dying and bereavement
- People feel better equipped to support each other through the difficult times that can come with death, dying and bereavement

We are interested to hear from any person or organisation who wants to work with us to make Scotland a place where people can be open about death, dying and bereavement.

This leaflet was originally produced by the Dying Matters Coalition which aims to change public knowledge, attitudes and behaviours towards dying, death and bereavement. Dying Matters is led by the National Council for Palliative Care, the umbrella charity for palliative, end of life and hospice care in England, Wales & Northern Ireland: [www.dyingmatters.org](http://www.dyingmatters.org)  
Registered Charity no.1005671

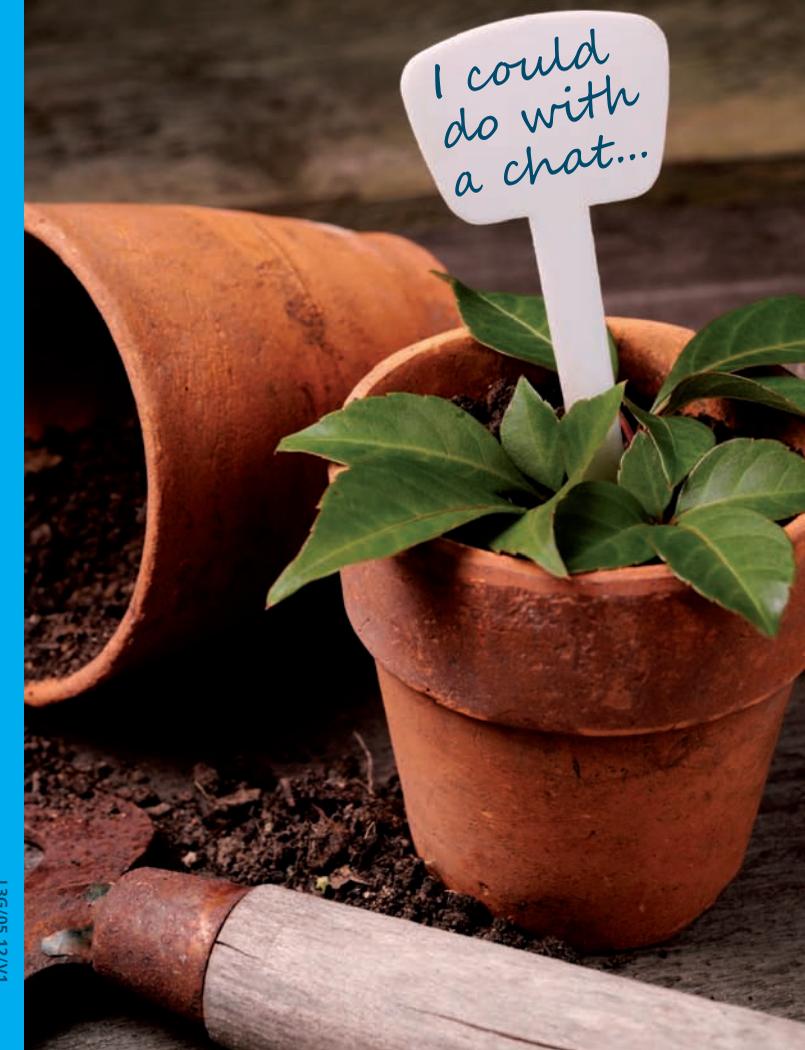


Dying Matters

'Let's talk about it'

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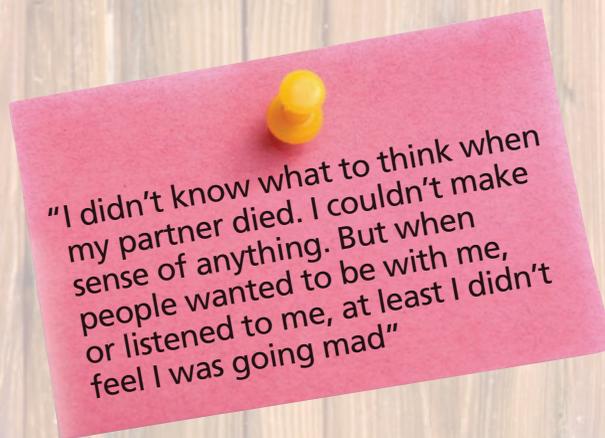
How to help someone close to you who has been bereaved



## The opportunity to talk

Sometimes people who have lost a loved one want the opportunity to talk. They may want to talk about their feelings, their worries about the present and future, or sometimes just about getting through the practicalities that come after someone has died. And as someone close to them, you're specially placed to offer them those opportunities.

There's no one right way or wrong way of doing this: it all depends on the personalities of those involved. But there are some general principles, based on people's experience of bereavement, which may provide you with some routes into helping those you love at one of their most difficult times.



"I didn't know what to think when my partner died. I couldn't make sense of anything. But when people wanted to be with me, or listened to me, at least I didn't feel I was going mad"

## Where to start

- Start from the assumption that it's better to do something than nothing – to acknowledge their loss rather than ignore it.
- Think of your own experiences – how you might feel under similar circumstances, the sorts of things that you might want from other people. But try to remember their grief may be different from yours.
- Look for invitations to talk from the other person. If they start talking about the person who has died, encourage them, even if it seems to make them upset. Being upset is normal.
- Be comforting when opening up the conversation rather than business-like. There's no formula to how people grieve and how others can help them through it – we struggle together towards solutions by being understanding.
- Don't be offended if your offer to talk is rejected – it may simply be the wrong time.
- Try and create an environment where the person has the freedom to talk or not talk, according to what they want. "I'm around all day if you fancy a chat..."

## Keep the conversation going

- Words aren't always necessary, or easy. How do you explain the inexplicable? Sometimes it helps just to be with somebody, especially if they don't seem to want to talk.
- If they do start to talk about things that matter to them, you can encourage them by asking open-ended questions, or simply by showing that you're really listening to them.
- It's not necessarily what you say that's going to make the difference to the other person, but the way that you listen to them. If you don't impose your views, they're more likely to be able to say what they want.
- Provide them with opportunities to talk about what's worrying them: turning the conversation to the future, for example, may help them express anxieties about what they're going to do without the other person.
- Be prepared that the person may want to go over what has happened, or what's worrying them, over and over again. It can be a way of coming to terms with something.

## Help with practicalities

Most people who have experienced bereavement say how much they have appreciated offers of practical help. When someone has died, there are a lot of jobs to be done.

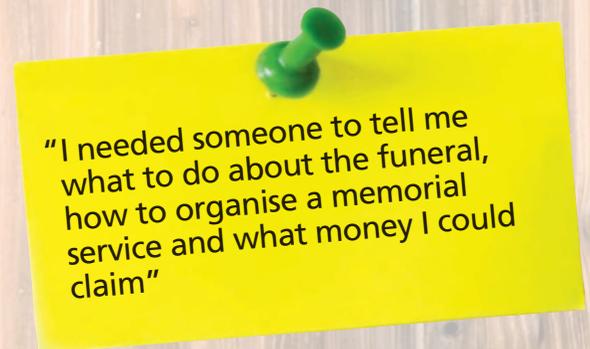
In the immediate days after a death, these include:

- Registering the death
- Finding the will
- Making funeral arrangements

In the days and weeks afterwards, there are dozens of people to contact: relatives, friends, employers, colleagues, solicitor, accountant, mortgage company, pension company, tax office, bank, utilities, passport office, social services, benefits office, clubs, associations.

These are jobs that a bereaved person may well want, or need, to do themselves. But they may want someone to be with them while doing them, or be on hand to help if needed. It could be that the most useful thing you can do is provide a meal, or do some shopping, to allow them time to do them.

People usually find it easier to accept offers of help if you suggest specific tasks. Rather than saying: "Let me know if there's anything I can do", you could offer to phone people you know, sort out the flowers, or look after children or other dependents. But make sure you deliver on any promises to help.



"I needed someone to tell me what to do about the funeral, how to organise a memorial service and what money I could claim"

