

# Supporting Those Who Grieve

## Zusman Hospice Bereavement Support



How can we effectively support those who grieve? We all want to see a friend, family member, co-worker or employee begin to feel in control of their life again. The caring presence of another human being is known to be one of the most important supports a grieving person can have. The type of relationship you have with the grieving person may suggest what supportive role is appropriate. It may not be possible for you to meet all of their needs. Even so, you may be able to refer them to others who can give them the support and help they need. Here are some practical suggestions on how to be supportive.

### **Encourage the Grieving Person to Talk About Their Loss**

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Talking about the loss in detail and as often as is needed is an important part of healing. A grieving person may need to flush out difficult emotions by going over the story of what happened again and again. Most grieving people find it painful when friends or co-workers choose not to mention the loss. One woman commented, "They made me feel like my son never existed."

If a survivor is not ready to talk about a loss, you can still establish yourself as someone who is willing to listen whenever that person is ready. Some of us are afraid we will make a grieving person cry or feel worse if we mention the loss. Tears are healing. Talking about our grief generally lightens the load even as it brings up strong emotions. If survivors have limited opportunities to talk about their loss, encourage them to join a support group or consider counseling.

### **Help the Grieving Person to Understand Their Feelings**

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Many grieving people may be uncomfortable with some of their feelings, such as rage or relief. They may question whether these feelings are normal. It is essential that they get solid information on the grief process by talking to another person who has been through the experience, joining a support group, reading handouts or books, listening to tapes about the grief process or talking to a counselor who is experienced in grief related issues.

Address  
1151 College Avenue  
Columbus, Ohio  
43209

Phone  
614-559-0350  
Email  
zh@whv.org

Web  
whv.org

## Allow the Grieving Person to Grieve in Their Own Way

Each person grieves differently and needs to be encouraged to respect their own limits, timetables and intuition about what they are ready to handle. Survivors get a lot of unsolicited and confusing advice about what they should be doing and feeling. Grieving people often need permission to not be OK. In a society where we frequently equate emotional pain with weakness and lack of self-control, griever often have unrealistic ideas about how well they should be doing. Grief hurts, and it hurts for a long time.

## Be Available Over Time

Grieving people need support through the first year and at the first anniversary of the death. Much of the hardest grieving begins after a few months. Birthdays, holidays and wedding anniversaries can be difficult. The greatest need for support often comes at a point when offers of support have significantly decreased.

## Encourage Self-Care Activities

Fatigue, loss of concentration and changes in appetite are just a few of the common physical symptoms of grief. Survivors often feel reassured after a thorough physical exam and should be encouraged to have one in the months after a loss. Exercise, attention to healthy eating and adequate rest are important. Medication that alters moods should be taken conservatively under a doctor's close supervision. The use of excessive drugs or alcohol only delays the grieving process. Encourage the grieving person to make his or her own needs a priority.



Grief support is available to you and your loved ones from the Zusman Hospice Bereavement Staff.

We offer support through phone calls, individual counseling and group sessions.

Please contact us at **614-559-0350**.

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 THE COLUMBUS FOUNDATION

Address  
1151 College Avenue  
Columbus, Ohio  
43209

Phone  
614-559-0350  
Email  
zh@whv.org

Web  
whv.org

  
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Heritage  
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