Holding Space for Grief

A conversation guide for families and community supporters.

01 Let grief be individual

Loss may involve a death, a changed relationship, an illness, a role, or a future someone expected. People grieve differently.

- [ ] Ask whether the person wants to talk or simply have company.
- [ ] Use the person's words for the loss and what it means.
- [ ] Make room for sadness, anger, relief, numbness, and mixed feelings.
- [ ] Avoid timelines, forced optimism, or "at least..." statements.

02 Words that leave room

Try: "I'm sorry this is happening." "I'm here to listen." "Would you like to tell me about them or about what has changed?" "What would feel helpful today?"

Something I could say in my own natural voice

What I should avoid assuming or trying to fix

Grief is not a linear process. Listen without comparing losses or prescribing how someone should feel.

Support Beyond the First Conversation

Turn compassionate intentions into realistic, ongoing care.

03 Offer something specific

- [ ] A meal, errand, ride, or help with an everyday task
- [ ] A check-in on a meaningful date
- [ ] Help finding culturally appropriate or accessible support
- [ ] Quiet company, a shared memory, or a chance to decline

A specific offer I can make without overpromising

When and how I will check back (with permission)

04 Make space for different needs

Beliefs, rituals, accessibility, privacy, or family preferences to respect

05 Know when to connect additional help

If grief-related distress is persistent, worsening, or making daily functioning difficult, offer support connecting with a qualified professional or grief support service. If someone talks about suicide, respond directly and seek crisis support.

For immediate danger, call emergency services. In the U.S., call or text 988 for crisis support. This is an educational conversation aid, not clinical assessment or treatment.