



SINGAPORE
HOSPICE
COUNCIL

Living before Leaving

Supporting
GRIEF
in the Community

How We Can Help The
Bereaved Around Us



SUPPORTING GRIEF IN THE COMMUNITY

HOW WE CAN HELP THE BEREAVED AROUND US

Losing someone through death (i.e. bereavement) is an experience most people would go through at some point in life. Having the care and support of others around them can make a difference to the bereaved.

If you belong to a group that meets regularly or you are a member of interest groups (e.g. walking group, taiji class etc), grassroots committee, care/activity centre, or community club, this brochure gives you suggestions on

- how to support members of your group who have lost a loved one; and
- how to support other members of the group when a member died.



WHEN A GROUP MEMBER HAS LOST A LOVED ONE

1 Participate in the funeral service and keep in touch

During the funeral period, do

- let the bereaved share about their experience as much or as little as they are comfortable with, and listen without judgement.
- take note of any potential issues they may have and connect them to community resources for support (see point 3 below).

The bereaved may feel lonely when everyone stops contacting them after the funeral. Try to keep in contact with them after the funeral, even if you can only do so by phone calls or text messages.

2 Give practical help

You can also offer practical help, for example:

- standing in for some of their routine responsibilities - picking up the children from school/childcare or helping with household chores - cleaning, laundry, preparing a meal, buying groceries; and
- Helping those less proficient in English to review documents and correspond with agencies related to the deceased's estate.

It can be difficult for the bereaved to tell you what they need help with. Be specific when offering practical help, such as "I can help you buy dinner for the rest of this week." If they decline the practical help offered, do respect their decision.

WHEN A GROUP MEMBER HAS LOST A LOVED ONE

3 Connect to community resources

While you try to be consistent in the support that you provide to the bereaved, be aware of your own limitations. There are other groups in the community you can connect the bereaved so that more help is available. These groups include

- religious organisations
- grassroots organisations
- voluntary welfare organisations
- family service centres
- senior activity centres
- schools
- social service office
- polyclinics or even
- clan associations

Check with the bereaved if they already belong to any of the above groups and if they are open to approach any of them for support.

4 Invite them to rejoin your group

Some members of your group may not have been active due to caregiving duties or when they are newly bereaved. Do make an effort to invite them back into the group at an appropriate time.

The bereaved may feel awkward and worry about how to interact with other members of the group after their loss. Be patient yet encouraging. Accompany them to the group activities for the first few times. Check on them after that to make sure they are not overwhelmed. Do not give up on them.

WHEN A GROUP MEMBER PASSES AWAY

The death of a fellow member who shared common life experiences, life stage or similar interests may trigger grief reactions in other members such as

- shock
- sadness
- disbelief

It may heighten the awareness of one's mortality in some members or remind others of their own loss experiences.

To help support other group members affected by a death of a member, do:

- allow group members to share their reactions about the death;
- respect that different members may have different ways to cope with the loss of a fellow group member;
- as a group, find opportunities to remember the deceased member;
- share memories and legacies of the deceased;
- remind fellow members that missing the deceased and feeling sad etc. are normal human reactions; and
- look out for indication that some members may require additional support (see next section).



LOOK OUT FOR THESE SIGNS

Most bereaved are able to cope with their losses over time and with the support of family members and friends. However, some bereaved may require additional support if the circumstances of the death are difficult or if the bereaved has many other issues to worry about.

Some signs that indicate the bereaved may require additional support are as follows:

- they appear to be persistently struggling with day-to-day activities
- there are complaints about more physical ailments
- they withdraw from social interactions for a prolonged period of time
- they do not seem like their usual selves
- pre-existing mental health conditions worsen
- there is increased use of intoxicants such as alcohol, drugs, cigarettes

Please refer to <https://singaporehospice.org.sg/community-bereavement-service-providers/> for a list of community bereavement service providers.

BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT ETIQUETTE

Sometimes, some deaths may receive a lot of publicity in the press and social media. When that occurs, do try to observe the following guidelines.

DOs:

1. Be mindful when using social media to express your reactions and opinions about a death.
2. Leave it to the bereaved to express their grief on social media instead.
3. Verify the accuracy of any information related to the death events.
4. Respect the privacy of the bereaved family.

DON'Ts:

1. Avoid circulating videos, images and personal accounts of events relating to the circumstances of the death.
2. Do not attend the deceased's wake and funeral only to satisfy your curiosity.
3. Do not circulate information related to the deceased or bereaved indiscriminately.

WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION



This brochure is adapted from the chapter *Supporting Grief in the Community* in the book *Caring for Yourself and Others After a Death* published by Singapore Hospice Council. The e-copy of the book can be downloaded at library.singaporehospice.org.sg

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