



Caring for Grieving People during the COVID-19 Crisis

Grieving the loss of a loved one is difficult under any circumstances, but the effects of the ongoing coronavirus crisis have made grief even harder for many.

- Family members may have been isolated from their loved one and not had the chance for closure or saying their final goodbyes.
- Limitations on gatherings prevent loved ones from physically gathering to grieve and reminisce together at funerals and memorial services.
- Extended family and friends are unable to visit and offer in-person support and condolences.
- Comforting acts like hugging the grieving person, holding their hand, or sitting with them just aren't possible right now.
- In the midst of their grief, people are also dealing with increased stress, anxiety, and other losses because of the crisis.
- As those around the grieving person are facing many challenges of their own, they may have less emotional energy to reach out and offer care.

Whether or not a death was directly due to the coronavirus, factors like these compound the pain and isolation that many grieving people feel. Pastors, chaplains, and other caregivers are working diligently to

provide as much care as they can, but current conditions limit what they're able to do right now. That's where the care you offer can make a big difference.

Principles for Caring for a Grieving Person during Social Distancing

Even when you can't offer care in person, there are still ways to be a light in the darkness of someone's grief.

- **Be there emotionally for the person.** When you are not able to be physically present, you can still let the person know you're there for them and you do care. As you connect with them, give them your full attention.
- **Use the phone or video chat.** When being physically present isn't possible, the next best way to care is by phone or video chat. Your voice and face can communicate compassion and support much more effectively than a text or email.
- **Encourage the honest expression of feelings.** In a caring way, ask how the grieving person is really doing and what they're thinking and feeling, and show that you're willing to listen. If the person doesn't have a lot to say initially, that's okay. Just continue to be available, and as time goes on,

they'll most likely appreciate having a safe person to open up to.

- **Listen and validate.** Validating lets the person know you heard what they said and you accept that they feel that way. For instance, if the person says, “Sometimes it hurts so much I don’t know what to do,” a validating response would be “That sounds awful. I’m sorry you’re going through that.”
- **Avoid platitudes or other words that discount the person’s feelings.** Platitudes are words that sound caring or helpful on the surface but usually end up causing further pain, such as “She lived a good, long life” or “Only the good die young.” Words that discount the person’s feelings include “At least . . .” or “You shouldn’t feel that way.”
- **Let the person know that it’s okay to grieve.** Too often people feel pressured to rush

through their grief or bury their feelings, and that may be especially true in the current crisis. As the first *Journeying through Grief* book points out, grieving is normal, natural, and necessary. Encourage the person to take the time they need to grieve.

- **Be there for the long term.** Grief takes time, so if you’re willing and able, let the person know you’ll be there for them throughout the grief journey—and then follow through. Check in periodically to see how they’re doing. They’ll likely appreciate knowing you remember their loss and still care.

Even though it’s not the same as in-person care, these behaviors can make a big difference to someone who’s grieving, especially during these times when people may be feeling very alone.

To see other COVID-19 communications, visit stephenministries.org/covid19.

About *Journeying through Grief*

Journeying through Grief is a set of four short books to send to people at four crucial times during the first year after the loss of a loved one.

Book 1: *A Time to Grieve* sent 3 weeks after the loss

Book 2: *Experiencing Grief*. sent 3 months after the loss

Book 3: *Finding Hope and Healing* sent 6 months after the loss

Book 4: *Rebuilding and Remembering* sent 11 months after the loss

Each book focuses on what the person is likely to be experiencing at that point in grief, offering understanding, empathy, compassion, and hope. They provide a tangible, meaningful way to show you care, especially when you can’t be there in person.

To learn more, visit stephenministries.org/JTG.

