

Transcript: Grief Kind Class #2 - What can you say to be Grief Kind?

Is there anything you should say?

When somebody has told you that they've been bereaved, I think our natural response is often to want to rescue. And so often people are looking for some kind of magic formula of what can I say to make it better?

Best thing we can do is listen. And we might want to ask them how they're feeling about it. What's that been like for them? I would encourage the person who's supporting to listen to the emotion behind the presentation.

I need to show this person that I'm okay with their pain, that this pain is something I just need to be there for and with, saying, "I can see that you're suffering and I'm here for you with this pain, however bad it gets", and just showing people that you get the landscape that they're moving in.

When people experience loss or bereavement, it's not unusual for people to say, "well, actually, I don't want to talk about it". We might have a sense that they need to talk about it. We want to reiterate the fact that we're willing to be there, and we might even want to ask, "well, is it all right if I keep checking in?"

Is there anything you shouldn't say?

So, we don't want to say things like, "well they're at peace now, you don't have to watch them suffer, well you can always get married again, you're young enough to get married again, or you'll find somebody else". Those kinds of things are just not really helpful because it removes that person from the opportunity to kind of be able to feel from a practical standpoint, and we're wanting to pay a little bit more attention to the feeling when we're supporting people.

Another thing probably not good to say are things around, you know, "they're in a better place now". It just completely cancels out all the effort, all the love, all the work they've put into a relationship, into a life that you build with someone. It's very natural to kind of go, oh, you know, "I know just how you feel, my granddad died too", and then before you know it, you're kind of talking about your grief rather than supporting them in their feelings. So, it's best to try not to bring the attention onto yourself if you can.

Why is listening so important?

If somebody is talking and we jump in with a question, for example, and it might be a valid question of, you know, "how did that come about?", we're then directing them down this path of telling us how that came about, when maybe they were going to go down this path over here. So really, the more we can just be there and listen, the more we allow them to tell their story in their own way, in their own words, to say what they need to say.

And we can acknowledge those thoughts, they're going to feel heard, they're going to feel empathised with, and they're going to feel understood and that much more supported. Validating somebody's feelings is really, is simply accepting their feelings and accepting that this is how they feel and that they have a right to feel this way, that they don't have to feel any way different.

What should you do if you mess up?

Well, the first thing I would say is don't be too worried. If we're having a conversation with people that we know and that we love and we have good relationships with them, they're going to forgive us and we're going to clearly know when we've messed up because they're probably going to tell us either in the way they kind of respond, or in even some of the body language. And people very much appreciate when you put your hand up and say, "ooh, I'm really sorry, I don't think I did that right, what can I do to help? What is going to help?" And they will tell you.

The nature of the game is that, you know, you are in unknown territory with the grieving person. We might say something that doesn't go down too well or maybe we hold on to things and overcomplicate in our heads because we don't want to make them feel worse or want to make it worse.

It's around thinking, how can we normalise this for them and what can we do to be there for them without overthinking it? And if we mess up, we just say, "I can't believe I just said that, I don't know where that's come from, I'm really sorry." When you know someone, things are fixable, nothing is, you know, ending with one silly thing that you said.