

Tip sheet

Guidelines for helping bereaved people



Tips to keep in mind

- Recognise that individuals are different and react differently. Feelings are likely to be changeable, therefore reactions will differ from time to time within the same person
- Bereaved people often have difficulty concentrating, so keep sentences short and don't introduce complex ideas
- Ask if they want to talk about it. If they are willing to talk, ask gentle, respectful questions about the death, the funeral and the time since, and what changes have had to be made
- Allow them to express their emotions about their loss. Be patient if they repeat themselves. Learn to be comfortable with pauses and silence
- Don't hide your own grief about the loss. Tell them briefly of your reaction to the death. Tell them what the person meant to you and what you valued about them. Share your memories of the deceased person
- Use plain language – e.g. 'dead', 'killed', 'took their life' instead of 'taken' or 'lost'.
- Don't tell them about your grief experiences unless they ask. If they do, keep it brief and recognise that there will be similarities and differences, so advice-giving does not always help
- Only hug if you feel comfortable doing it and you have clear indications that it will be welcomed. A touch on the arm, shoulder, back or hand can be comforting as well
- Don't use cliches such as 'time heals', 'they've gone to a better place', 'it was for the best' ...
- Do offer practical help: an easily heated complete meal, hanging out their washing, cleaning shoes, taking the dog and/or children for a walk, etc. Just be careful not to bustle or organise them.
- If you know they are having a lot of visitors, wait for a quieter time to visit. Visit and/or phone again after the first few weeks. Invite them for meals or outings. Arrange to take them home at any stage if it gets too much for them. Remember to make contact on anniversaries and birthdays.

Your genuine concern and efforts to help will be appreciated.

Contact

0508 664 981
assistance@vitae.co.nz
www.vitae.co.nz