

10
THINGS
GRIEVING
PEOPLE
WISH
OTHERS
UNDERSTOOD



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Many grieving people feel isolated in their grief. As a society, we don't fully understand what they're going through. In the United States especially, we are not taught how to handle grief, and it's often not openly discussed.

As a result, people often don't know what to do when someone experiences a loss. They may say something that unintentionally hurts the grieving person, or avoid them altogether. Either way, the grieving person can feel isolated, misunderstood, and alone.

It often isn't until someone experiences their own loss that they truly understand what's needed. I hear clients say, "I wish I had known what to do or say... I just didn't know any better." I remind them to have grace for themselves — we simply aren't taught this.

Many people are afraid of saying the wrong thing or making someone cry. If the grieving person does cry, they may feel uncomfortable or unsure how to respond. They don't want to make it worse, but they don't realize how avoidance or discomfort can impact the grieving person.

This guide is here to help bridge that gap and offer a better understanding of what grieving people need and want as they move through the loss of a loved one — or even a pet. These relationships represent a deep love and connection that now feels severed.

The depth of the love will impact the depth of the grief. No two people grieve the same, and the nature of the relationship will influence how deeply someone feels the loss.

So let's dive into the ten things grieving people wish others understood.

1. They Need To Talk About The Person Who Died

They need to be able to tell their story and talk about the person who died. It helps them process their grief, and talking about their loved one keeps the connection alive.

Crying while talking about the person is an important part of healing. Many people feel that by stopping a grieving person from crying they are being helpful, but in reality they may be interrupting a very natural and important part of the process.

They are already in pain, so not allowing them to talk about it and cry can make them feel even more isolated and misunderstood.

Grief needs to be seen and heard. It validates their pain when someone is able to sit with them and just listen.

There is often no need to say anything — just being with them and being compassionate is enough.

Telling stories about the person who died helps the grieving person process their grief. It keeps their memories alive and helps them stay connected to their loved one.

They need to say the person's name.

1. They Need To Talk About The Person Who Died

(Continued)

Many times, people avoid saying the name of the person who died. While it may feel like the “right” thing to do, it can actually make the grieving person feel like their loved one doesn’t matter or is being forgotten.

Many grieving people are afraid their loved one will be forgotten.

You can say:

“I was thinking about _____ today...”

“I remember when they...”

This can feel incredibly comforting.

Be comfortable with their emotions.

They may cry. They may be quiet. They may be angry.

You don’t need to change how they feel.

You can say:

“It makes sense that you feel this way.”

2. They Need You To Be There — Not Disappear

Many times, people think the grieving person is doing okay when, in reality, they are struggling and feeling very isolated and misunderstood.

People often go back to their regular lives and routines and don't realize how important it is to continue checking in and spending time with the grieving person.

There are also times when grieving people need time alone to process their grief, especially in the early weeks and months. It is very common for a grieving person to isolate because the pain can feel unbearable and heavy.

It is also common for them to feel very tired, unmotivated, and fatigued.

**So when in doubt, ask:
“Would you like some company?”, or
“Do you need some time to rest?”**

Even if they decline, they will still feel supported knowing you showed up.

2. They Need You To Be There — Not Disappear

(Continued)

Check in after everyone else stops.

Support is often strong in the beginning, but fades over time — while the grief is still very present weeks, months, and even years later.

A simple message like:

“I’ve been thinking about you — how are you doing today?”
can mean everything.

Even small gestures — a card, a meal, flowers, or a simple ***“I’m thinking of you”*** text with no expectation to respond — can help them feel supported.

Remember important dates like birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays.

“I know today might be a hard day. I’m thinking of you.”

Grief can feel incredibly isolating. Even if you don’t know what to say, your presence matters.

A simple ***“I’m here”*** means more than you realize.

3. Grief Doesn't Have A Timeline

Healing from grief is a very slow process, and it is widely misunderstood how long it can take.

It is common for grief to take years.

Even if a grieving person seems “better,” they are often still actively grieving.

The depth of the love often reflects the depth of the grief.

Grief may always leave a scar.

Even years later, something may remind them of their loved one and bring up emotion — and that is normal.

In early grief, especially the first year, many people may feel numb or in shock. This is the body's way of protecting them from overwhelming pain.

3. Grief Doesn't Have A Timeline

(Continued)

Many people don't understand why, after a year or more, the grieving person may seem worse instead of better. This is often because the initial shock has worn off, and the reality of the loss is setting in more deeply.

It's important not to rush someone to “feel better” or try to speed up their grief.

Avoid:

“Things will get better soon”

Instead, try:

“I'm here with you through this.”

Grief moves at its own pace.

You cannot rush a person through grief, but you can support them, understand them, and love them while they are going through it.

4. They Can't Just "Move On"

Grief is not something they leave behind.

They don't "get over" the loss.

They learn how to live with it.

I prefer the term "*moving forward*" rather than "moving on," because it reflects carrying the love, memories, and connection — not leaving them behind.

Pushing someone to move forward before they are ready can feel overwhelming. It's important not to say things like, "*It's been 6 months, a year, 2 years... why aren't you better?*" or "*Why are you still _____?*"

These kinds of statements can make the grieving person feel pressured or like their feelings aren't normal, when in fact, grief often takes much longer than people expect.

Many grieving people feel pressure to do things they are not ready for.

"I should clean out their closet."

"I should go to the cemetery."

4. They Can't Just “Move On”

(Continued)

Instead, ask:

“Does that feel right for you right now?”

Encourage them to follow what feels right for them, rather than what they feel they “should” do.

Many times they feel like they “should” do certain things because other people tell them to, or because of expectations they feel they are supposed to live up to.

I encourage all grieving people to follow their internal GPS — their own intuition and what truly resonates with them — rather than acting from “I should.”

“I should” often reflects unrealistic expectations, whether they come from within or from others.

Grief needs compassion, not expectations.

There is no quick fix for grief. Dating, staying busy, or trying to “move forward” won't erase the loss.

Grief isn't something to fix — it's something to move through.

5. Their World Feels Completely Changed

Loss doesn't just take a person.

It changes routines, identity, relationships,
and the way life feels.

The death of a loved one can be extremely
destabilizing.

A grieving person may have to learn how to
recreate a new identity or role in life.

Everything can feel unfamiliar for a while.

Even simple things — missed phone calls,
meals, holidays, and celebrations — may
now feel empty or lonely.

5. Their World Feels Completely Changed

(Continued)

Let's try a visualization exercise:

Think about your average day-to-day life and the people in it. Really take a moment to visualize what your typical day looks like.

Now imagine if one or more of those people were suddenly not there anymore.

How would that change your day?

Now go one step further and imagine that they are never coming back — that you can never see them again.

Really sit with that feeling.

There are likely people in your life whose presence, conversations, and support you rely on.

Now imagine that connection is suddenly gone.

This is the grieving person's reality.

Their world has changed, and they are learning how to live in it.

6. They May Not Enjoy Things Like They Used To

Things that once brought joy may now feel heavy, painful, or meaningless.

This is not them being negative — this is grief.

Grief brings an overwhelming sense of heaviness, emptiness, and longing.

Many activities, places, or traditions may remind them of their loved one.

A favorite restaurant, a park, or even certain routines may now feel painful because that person is no longer there to share it with them.

For some, they may never return to certain places.

For others, they may — but it can take time, sometimes years.

6. They May Not Enjoy Things Like They Used To

(Continued)

Grief takes a tremendous amount of emotional energy.

Many grieving people feel exhausted.

I often ask:

“If you had surgery, would you expect yourself to get up and function right away?”

Everyone answers “no”.

We don't always view emotional pain the same way we view physical pain.

The reality is, the grieving person's heart has been broken and their world has changed.

They need time, space, and compassion to heal.

7. Grief May Change Them — And Your Relationship

Grief often changes how a person sees the world.

Many grieving people find that their perspective shifts. They begin to see what truly matters and what no longer feels important.

Things that once felt significant may no longer carry the same weight.

They may focus more on spending time with the people they love.

Some relationships may deepen, while others may fade.

It is also common for grieving people to struggle in relationships with those who don't understand their experience.

Superficial relationships may feel more difficult to maintain.

Some people may struggle with their faith, while others may become more connected to it.

All of this is normal.

7. Grief May Change Them — And Your Relationship

(Continued)

They may feel different. They may show up differently.

This does not mean they don't care — it means they are adapting to loss.

I often encourage grieving people to ask for what they need.

For those supporting them, it can be helpful to offer specific options instead of general questions.

For example:

“Want me to come sit with you?”

“We don't have to talk — I can just be there.”

“I would like to drop off dinner tonight.”

“Can I help with errands this week?”

“Can I pick up groceries for you this week?”

“I'm free Thursday — want company or a walk?”

“Can I help with watching children or pets?”

This takes the pressure off the grieving person to figure out what they need.

8. Ways People Unintentionally Minimize Grief (And Why It Can Feel Hurtful)

Even well-meaning words can sometimes make grief feel smaller instead of supported.

Phrases to Avoid:

“At least they lived a long life”

This can feel like the loss should hurt less because of their age.

But grief isn't measured by time — it's measured by love.

“At least they're no longer suffering”

While this may be true, it shifts the focus away from the grieving person's pain.

Someone can feel relief and still feel deep loss.

“Everything happens for a reason”

This can feel dismissive and confusing in the middle of grief.

Most grieving people are not looking for meaning — they are trying to get through the pain.

“They're in a better place”

This may align with some beliefs, but not everyone finds comfort in it.

It can sometimes feel like their pain is being bypassed.

8. Ways People Unintentionally Minimize Grief (And Why It Can Feel Hurtful)

(Continued)

Phrases to Avoid (Continued):

“You’re so strong”

This can unintentionally create pressure to hold everything together.

Many grieving people don’t feel strong — they feel like they are just surviving.

“You’ll get through this”

While meant to be encouraging, it can feel like a push to move forward before they are ready.

“Stay positive”

Grief is not a time for positivity.

It is a time for honesty, pain, and processing.

“They wouldn’t want you to be sad”

This can create guilt for feeling natural emotions.

8. Ways People Unintentionally Minimize Grief

(And Why It Can Feel Hurtful)

(Continued)

Phrases to Avoid (Continued):

“I know exactly how you feel”

Every grief experience is different, even if you have experienced loss.

“Let me know if you need anything”

This puts the responsibility on the grieving person to ask for help when they often don't have the energy to do so.

“You have other children” or “You can have other children”

These statements can feel incredibly painful and dismissive, especially for someone who has lost a child.

Each child is unique and irreplaceable. The loss of that specific child cannot be replaced by having or focusing on other children.

While someone may still have other children, they are grieving the loss of this child — their presence, their personality, their role in the family, and the future they imagined with them.

For those who do not have other children, being told they can “have more” can feel equally painful. It can minimize the depth of the loss and overlook the emotional, physical, and personal journey connected to that child.

There is no replacement for a child who has died.

What grieving parents need most is acknowledgment of their loss, their love, and their pain — not reassurance that something else can take its place.

8. Ways People Unintentionally Minimize Grief (And Why It Can Feel Hurtful) (Continued)

A more supportive approach:

“I’m so sorry. I’m here with you.”

“This is really hard.”

“I see you, and I see the pain you’re carrying.”

“I don’t have the right words, but I care about you.”

“Do you want to talk about them?”

A note about asking grieving people, *“How are you?”*

For some grieving people, this question can feel difficult to answer in the moment. They may not want to explain how they’re truly doing, or may not even have the words for it.

In these cases, it can be more supportive to ask:

“How has your week been?”

or

“What’s something new that’s happened in your world?”

It’s also important to give the grieving person permission to share what feels helpful or unhelpful to them, including how certain questions land.

Grief doesn’t need to be explained away or made smaller. It needs to be witnessed, supported, and given space.

9. Some Days Will Feel Heavier Than Others — Without Warning

Grief is unpredictable.

A normal day can suddenly feel overwhelming.

This does not mean they are going backwards — it is simply how grief moves.

A grieving person may need to leave an activity or event if they begin to feel overwhelmed.

Allow them the space to do that without making it a big deal.

It can be helpful to have a “Plan B” before attending social events.

Knowing they have an exit plan can help them feel more in control in a situation where they may feel out of control emotionally.

This may even increase the likelihood that they attend, even if only for a short time.

Grieving people can feel embarrassed if they become emotional in public, especially at events that are meant to be celebratory.

It also takes a lot of emotional energy to hold back those feelings.

After events like this, they may need time to rest and decompress.

Understanding this can help them feel supported and safe.

10. They Will Find Their Way — In Their Own Time

Healing does not mean forgetting. It means learning to live with the loss and that happens slowly, in their own way, on their own timeline.

The most helpful things you can do are to listen, care, support, and love them.

Healing is not linear, and it can be hard to witness.

If you are supporting someone who is grieving, it is also important to take care of yourself.

Supporting someone through grief can be emotionally draining. You need to make sure you are also filling your own cup. You cannot pour from an empty cup. You cannot fix or heal someone else's pain. This is their journey.

Be honest with yourself about what you have the capacity for.

You may need to set boundaries and encourage them to seek additional support such as a grief group or one-on-one support.

It is not your responsibility to be everything to them.

Your role is to support them in the ways that you can — with honesty, compassion, and care.

Healing and moving forward will happen when they are ready.



I am Nicole Marie, a Life & Grief Coach and the founder of Through the Tears Life Coaching.

I support individuals navigating grief, loss, and life transitions by providing a compassionate, understanding, and non-judgmental space to process their emotions.

My approach focuses on helping people move through grief in a way that feels authentic to them — while developing tools to cope, heal, and begin to move forward without leaving their loved one behind.

I offer both one-on-one support and group experiences, meeting people wherever they are in their grief journey.

You can learn more or schedule a session with me directly at my website:

ThroughTheTears.com
(Virtual & In-Person Session Available)