



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 pandemic have made grief even harder for people, whether or not a death is directly due to the coronavirus. With so many dealing with losses, limitations on gatherings, isolation, and increased stress and anxiety, it can be difficult for people to grieve fully and receive the care and support they need.

That's where the care you offer can make a big difference.

Principles for Caring for a Grieving Person during Social Distancing

Here are some ways to be a light in the darkness of someone's grief, even when you can't offer care in person.

Make the Connection

- Connect by phone or video chat when you can't be physically present—doing so lets you communicate compassion and support in real time.
- As you're willing and able, be there for them for the long term. Care for grieving people tends to drop off over time, so your checking in with them is likely to be greatly appreciated.

Encourage Open, Honest Sharing

- Encourage the grieving person to honestly share what they're really feeling.
- Let them know it's okay to grieve however they want to for as long as they need to.
- Be patient—if the person isn't ready to say much yet, that's okay.

Validate Their Feelings

- Mostly listen and validate, letting them know you heard what they said and you accept that they feel that way.
- Avoid trying to tell them how they should feel or what they should do.
- Avoid platitudes or other words that discount the person's feelings.

Self-Care When Caring for Grieving People

Because all of us are experiencing our own losses, stresses, and challenges right now, it's especially important that we also take time to care for ourselves. By making sure our own needs are met, we can better focus on caring for others.

Here are a few ideas to help care for yourself as you care for those who are grieving—and they apply to caring for other needs as well.

Address Your Own Grief and Difficult Feelings

- Give *yourself* time to grieve. Even if you haven't lost a loved one, it's natural to experience grief over how the pandemic has affected you. Let yourself feel what you feel.
- Find someone else you can share your personal feelings and struggles with. (If you're a Stephen Minister, that might be your Supervision Group.) Having a safe place to let out your own hurts makes it easier to focus on the grieving person.

Know Your Limits as a Caregiver

- Know your limits, and don't push yourself to provide care when you're struggling. It's okay to wait until you're feeling better, and you'll provide much more effective care.
- Be open to receiving care yourself from a pastor, a Stephen Minister, or another

caregiver when you need it. It's nothing to be ashamed of; each of us may be a caregiver at times and a care receiver at other times.

Maintain Good Boundaries in Your Care

- Avoid overidentifying with the grieving person—taking on their feelings to the point that you become overwhelmed. Instead, relate with empathy, seeking to understand their experience while maintaining your own perspective.
- Don't pressure yourself to fix the person's grief. Your being there to listen and care is powerful on its own—you can leave the rest to God, who brings ultimate healing.

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

Using *Journeying through Grief* to Care for a Grieving Person

Journeying through Grief is a set of four short books to send to someone at four crucial times during the difficult first year after losing a loved one. Each book focuses on what the person is likely to be feeling at that point in their grief, providing care, support, compassion, and hope.

Your sending the *Journeying through Grief* books is a tangible, meaningful way to show you care for someone, especially during times when you can't be there in person.

When you send the books, it's helpful to include a personal letter with each book as a further expression of your care. For sample letters you can adapt and use during the coronavirus crisis, visit stephenministries.org/letters.

