A WITH LOVE, ALWAYS RESOURCE

Supporting Someone Who Is Grieving

Show up, stay, and keep showing up

A longer, practical guide for the person standing beside a grieving friend or family member: why helping can feel so awkward, what to say and what to skip, help that actually helps, and how to still be there months from now, when almost everyone else has gone quiet.

BEFORE WE BEGIN

A Letter From With Love, Always

Dear friend,

I lost my mom when I was twenty-nine and my dad when I was thirty-five, so I have stood where the person you love is standing now. I have been the one answering the door with red eyes. I have been the one who could not return calls, not because I did not care, but because talking felt like lifting something too heavy. And I remember, with a clarity that still surprises me, exactly who showed up, and how.

Here is what I learned from the receiving end. I do not remember who said the perfect thing, because nobody did. I remember who came anyway. I remember a meal left quietly where I could find it. I remember a friend who said my mom's name months later, in an ordinary conversation, as if she still belonged in our lives, because she did. I remember the people who kept inviting me long after I had declined too many times in a row. Those small, steady things carried me in ways the big gestures never could.

I also remember the silences, and I say this gently, because I believe most of them came from love. People were afraid of saying the wrong thing, or of making me cry, or of intruding. So they waited for a better moment, and the better moment never announced itself, and the waiting turned into distance neither of us wanted. If that fear is why you picked up this guide, you are already doing the most important part. You are refusing to disappear.

Inside you will find honest words you can borrow, practical help that truly helps, a clear look at why some kind sentences land wrong, and a plan for the long months after the funeral, which is when support matters most and arrives least. You will not do this perfectly. That is not the standard, and it never was.

With Love, Always offers peer support shaped by lived experience. This is companionship, not clinical counseling, and nothing here is a rule. Every grieving person is different, and your loved one is the only expert on what helps them. Take what fits, leave what does not, and when in doubt, ask them and believe their answer.

PART ONE

Why Helping Feels So Awkward

The Fear of Saying the Wrong Thing

Almost everyone who loves a grieving person feels the same knot of fear: what if I say something clumsy and make it worse? That fear is understandable, and it is worth naming honestly, because unnamed fear tends to make decisions for us. It makes us draft a message ten times and send none of them. It makes us cross the street, delay the call, or wait until we have found the flawless words, which do not exist. Here is the truth from the other side of that fear. A grieving person rarely expects eloquence. They are not grading your sentences. What registers, what stays with them for years, is whether you were willing to be present in a moment that had no good words at all. A plain, honest sentence offered with love will always land better than a beautiful one that was never sent.

Showing Up Imperfectly Beats Disappearing

If you remember one idea from this whole guide, let it be this one: presence matters more than polish. A short visit where you mostly listened. A text that simply said you were thinking of them. Sitting on the porch together without fixing a single thing. These are not lesser forms of support because they are small. They are the real thing. Disappearing, even when it comes from respect or uncertainty, rarely feels like respect to the person left in the quiet. It feels like one more loss layered on top of the first. You do not have to know what you are doing. You do not have to be calm, or wise, or comfortable with tears. You only have to be there, and then be there again.

You Cannot Fix This, and That Is Not Failure

Many supporters struggle because they arrive with a fixer hidden inside them. They want to ease the pain, lift the mood, find the silver lining, solve the practical problem that will make everything feel more manageable. That instinct comes from love, but grief is not a problem with a solution waiting inside it. It is a response to losing someone who mattered, and it has to be lived through rather than repaired. Letting go of the fixing job is a relief for everyone. Your role is not to make the sadness smaller. Your role is to make sure the person you love does not have to carry it alone. Company, not cure. Witness, not rescue. Once that is settled, almost everything in this guide gets simpler.

Their Crying Is Not an Emergency

One quiet reason people pull away is that tears feel like an alarm. If the person you are supporting starts to cry, it can feel as though you have caused harm, said too much, or opened something you now need to close. Most of the time, none of that is true. Tears are often a sign that you said the name, or asked the real question, or made it safe enough for the feeling that was already there to come out. You do not need to stop the crying, apologize for it, or rush to fill it with cheerful talk. Stay. Breathe. Offer a tissue if one is near, and water if it is not. Let the moment be what it is. Being cried with, calmly and without flinching, is one of the deepest forms of support there is.

PART TWO

What to Say

Start With the Simple, True Sentence

The most helpful opening lines are almost always the shortest ones. They do three things at once: they name what happened, they say how you feel about it, and they make no demand for a reply, a performance, or reassurance that you did a good job saying them. Short is not a weakness here. Short is what a tired, grieving mind can actually take in. If you can manage nothing more elaborate on a hard day, a sentence like the one below, said sincerely, is complete support all by itself.

> *"I am so sorry. I love you, and I am here."*

Variations work the same way. "I heard the news, and I have been thinking about you all day." "There are no words, and I am not going anywhere." "You do not have to answer this. I just wanted you to know I am here." Notice that none of these explains the death, predicts the future, or asks the grieving person to manage your feelings about it. They simply place you beside them, which is exactly where support lives.

Say the Name of the Person Who Died

This may be the single most powerful thing in this guide. Say their name. Not "your loved one" or "the one you lost" every time, but their actual name, spoken naturally, the way you said it when they were alive. Grieving people often describe a painful second disappearance: within weeks, almost everyone stops saying the name, out of fear of causing pain, and the person begins to vanish from ordinary conversation. Saying the name does the opposite. It says their life is still speakable. It says you remember them as a person, not only as a loss. It gives the grieving person permission to talk about them without having to be the brave one who brings them up first.

> *"I was driving past the lake today and thought of Tom and that terrible boat he loved so much. I miss him. I wanted you to know he came to mind."*

Use whatever name belongs to your own example, of course. The shape is what matters: a real memory, their name inside it, and no pressure attached. If tears come, remember Part One. The tears were already there. You simply gave them company.

Ask About Them, and Then Listen

Many grieving people are waiting, quietly and without much hope, for someone to ask about the person who died and actually want the answer. Ask what they were like. Ask for the story behind the photograph. Ask what has been hardest this week, and what a good memory of them has been lately. Then do the harder part: listen without steering. Listening well means resisting the urge to top the story with your own, to translate their feelings into advice, or to wrap the conversation up neatly because the emotion in it is big. Ask a follow up question instead. "What happened next?" "What do you miss most about that?" A grieving person can tell in seconds whether you want a real answer or a reassuring one. Offer the kind of listening that can hold the real one.

> *"Would you tell me about her? I realized I never heard how the two of you met, and I would love to know. Only if you feel like talking about her today."*

Ask How They Are, and Mean the Real Answer

"How are you?" is not a bad question. It only fails when it is asked as a greeting, with a correct answer already expected. Asked slowly, at a moment when you genuinely have time, it becomes an open door. Some supporters add one small phrase that gives the grieving person room to be honest: "today" or "really." Both signal that a true answer, including a hard one, will be received without panic or correction. And when the hard answer comes, receive it plainly. "That sounds brutal." "I am glad you told me the truth." You do not need to respond to pain with a plan. Being believed and not rushed is, for many people, the support itself.

> *"How are you doing today, really? You do not have to be okay with me, and you do not have to take care of me while you answer."*

PART THREE

What Not to Say, and What to Say Instead

A Note Before This List

Almost every sentence in this part has been said by kind people who meant well, including, at some point, most of us. If you have said one of them, you have not ruined anything. Grieving people generally hear the love underneath imperfect words, especially from someone who keeps showing up. This list is not about shame. It is about understanding why certain phrases tend to land wrong, so you can reach for better ones next time, starting today.

"They Are in a Better Place"

This lands wrong because it argues with the grief. However comforting the belief behind it may be to the person saying it, the grieving person is usually thinking something simpler and more stubborn: the place they want their loved one is here. The phrase can also assume a faith the grieving person may not share, or may be wrestling with, which turns a moment of comfort into a quiet theological debate they did not ask for. It skips past the pain instead of sitting with it. Try acknowledging the loss itself instead.

> *"I know how much you wanted more time with them. I am so sorry you did not get it."*

"Everything Happens for a Reason"

This phrase asks the grieving person to find a purpose in the worst thing that has happened to them, often while they are still in shock. Even people who eventually make meaning from a loss rarely want meaning handed to them by someone else, early, as an explanation. To the grieving ear, it can sound like the death has been justified, or that their pain is a lesson they should be grateful for. If a reason exists, it belongs to them to find, in their own time, or to never find at all. Your job is smaller and kinder: witness the loss without explaining it.

> *"I do not understand why this happened, and I hate that it happened to you. I am here for as long as this takes."*

"You Have to Be Strong"

This one lands wrong because it hands the grieving person a job at the exact moment they have the least to give. It also quietly sets a rule: falling apart is not allowed, at least not where anyone can see it. Many grieving people hear "be strong" as "please do not cry in front of me," and they comply, and then they grieve alone, which is the loneliest version of an already lonely thing. Strength is not what they need permission for. They need permission for the opposite: to be exactly as undone as they are, in front of someone safe. Give them that permission out loud.

> *"You do not have to hold it together around me. However this comes out is fine. I can handle your hard days."*

"Just Stay Busy" and "At Least" Sentences

Advice to stay busy treats grief like a room you can avoid entering, when in truth it tends to wait by the door. Busyness has its place, and many grieving people use work and routine as ballast. But prescribed busyness, offered as a remedy, tells them their feelings are a problem to outrun. Sentences that begin with "at least" do similar damage. "At least you had so many years." "At least they did not suffer long." Each one reaches for a bright side by shrinking the loss, and the grieving person hears the shrinking, not the brightness. Gratitude and grief can coexist, but the grieving person gets to introduce the gratitude. Until then, let the loss be the size it actually is.

> *"This is a huge loss, and it makes sense that it hurts this much. I am not going to try to find a bright side. There is not one yet."*

"Let Me Know If You Need Anything"

This is the most common sentence in all of grief support, and the emptiest, not because it is insincere but because it puts the work on the one person least able to do it. To use the offer, a grieving person must think of a task, decide it is reasonable, overcome the fear of being a burden, and make a request, all while exhausted and foggy. Almost nobody manages it, so the offer quietly expires unused, and both people walk away believing help was given and received. The fix is not a warmer version of the same sentence. The fix is a specific offer, which is the subject of the next part. Specific is what makes an offer real.

> *"I am bringing dinner on Thursday at six. I will leave it at the door unless you feel like company. No need to reply, and no need to return the dish."*

PART FOUR

Practical Help That Actually Helps

Make the Offer Specific, With a Day and a Time

A real offer has a task, a day, and a time in it, and it can be accepted with a single word. "I can mow the lawn this Saturday morning, or next Tuesday after work. Which suits you?" "I am going to the store at four. Text me your list, or I will just bring the basics." Specific offers work because they remove every decision except yes or no, and they prove you have actually thought about the person's real life. If the answer is no, accept it gracefully and offer again another week. A declined offer is not a failed one. It still told them they were thought of, concretely, by name, on a Tuesday. That message lands even when the lawn does not need mowing.

Food That Asks Nothing of Them

Food is the oldest language of support, and it works best when it asks for nothing in return. Bring food in containers that do not need to be returned, because a grieving household cannot track dishes on top of everything else. Bring food that survives the refrigerator and reheats without instructions, and include the unglamorous essentials people forget: breakfast food, coffee, fruit, snacks for the kids, food for the dog. Ask once about allergies and strong dislikes, then stop asking and start delivering. If cooking is not your strength, a gift card for a place that delivers is genuinely useful, as is quietly stocking the freezer and saying nothing about it. And remember the calendar: the freezer overflows in week one and is empty by week five. Food delivered in the second month is a small act of genius.

Rides, Errands, and the Paperwork of a Hard Season

A death generates an astonishing amount of logistics: appointments, forms, phone calls, trips across town, all landing on a person whose concentration may be measured in minutes. Offering your car and your afternoon is concrete mercy. Drive them to the appointment and wait in the car. Sit beside them while they make the hard phone call, and take notes, because details evaporate. Pick up the prescription, the dry cleaning, the relative at the airport. Offer to be the person who researches the plumber, compares the options, and presents two choices instead of twenty. You are lending them your working brain for tasks that require one, and in the early weeks, that loan is worth more than almost anything you could say.

Chores, Children, and the Ordinary Running of a House

Grief empties a house of its routines while leaving every routine still due. Laundry still piles up. The dog still needs walking. Children still need rides, lunches, and someone who can be cheerful about a spelling test. This is fertile ground for supporters, because these tasks are clear, finite, and obviously needed. Take the school run for two weeks. Fold the laundry you find in the dryer instead of stepping around it. Water the plants, take the bins out, sit with the children so the grieving parent can nap, shower, or stare at a wall in peace. Do not wait to be assigned. A trusted supporter who quietly handles the ordinary keeps the whole household from sliding, and lets the grieving person spend their small store of energy on the things only they can do.

Sitting in the House So They Are Not Alone in It

Some of the most valuable help involves no task at all. A house after a death can feel unbearably empty, or unbearably full of the person's absence, and many grieving people dread being alone in it at certain hours, especially evenings. Offer your presence as plainly as you would offer a meal. Come over and read while they rest. Watch the show they always watched, with them, without requiring commentary. Stay overnight in the spare room in the early days if that is welcome. The key is low demand: you are not a guest to be hosted, entertained, or fed. Say so explicitly, bring your own everything, and make your company restful instead of one more thing to manage.

> *"I am coming by at seven with my book. You do not need to talk, cook, or be good company. I will just be in the room, and I will let myself out at nine."*

PART FIVE

The Long Game

Week One: The Crowd

In the first days, support usually arrives in a flood. There are calls, flowers, visitors, casseroles, offers from every direction. The grieving person is surrounded, and often numb, and may remember very little of who did what. Your role in week one is simple and mostly practical: be useful, be brief unless asked to stay, and do not be hurt if your kindness is barely registered. It registered somewhere. More importantly, week one is when you should quietly make your longer plan, because you already know something the crowd has not figured out yet. The crowd is temporary. Decide now that you will not be.

Month Six: The Quiet

By six months, the arithmetic of support has usually reversed. The calls have stopped. Colleagues assume the person is back to normal, because they are functioning, and functioning is easy to mistake for healed. Invitations slow down. The name stops coming up. Meanwhile the grief itself has not retired; for many people it is only now arriving in full, as the shock wears off and the permanence of the loss settles in. This is the season when a single text can land like a rescue. Month six support does not need to be grand. It needs to exist. A check in. A remembered date. An invitation that keeps coming. The supporter who understands month six is the one grieving people talk about for the rest of their lives.

Why Everyone Leaves After the Funeral

It helps to understand the leaving, because understanding keeps you from joining it. People leave because life resumes its demands, and because our culture treats the funeral as the finish line of grief rather than its starting gate. They leave because they assume someone closer has it covered. They leave because they do not know what to say anymore, and each week of silence makes restarting feel more awkward, until the awkwardness itself becomes the reason. None of this is cruelty. It is drift. But drift is exactly why deliberate supporters matter so much. You cannot stop the crowd from leaving. You can simply refuse to drift, and build small habits, written into your calendar like any other commitment, that carry your support across the quiet months.

How to Be the One Who Stays

Staying is a practice, not a personality trait, and it runs on systems more than on feelings. Put a recurring note in your calendar: a text every few weeks, a call once a month, whatever rhythm you can honestly sustain for a year. Keep the bar low enough that you clear it on your busiest weeks; a two line message sent is worth infinitely more than a grand gesture planned and postponed. Keep inviting them, to dinner, to walks, to ordinary things, and treat each no as information about their energy, never as rejection of you. Expect the friendship to feel uneven for a while, with you giving more than you receive. That unevenness is not a problem in the relationship. It is the relationship, for now, and it balances out over a lifetime.

> *"No need to reply. I was thinking of you today, and of your dad. I hope the garden he loved is doing something ridiculous and wonderful right now."*

PART SIX

Remembering, Distance, and Different Grief

Remember the Dates, Out Loud

A grieving person lives with a private calendar of hard dates, and the loneliest part is how few other people seem to know it exists. Learn the big ones and write them down today: the day their loved one died, their loved one's birthday, their wedding anniversary if they were partners, and the holidays that were theirs together. Then, when a date approaches, say something. It does not need to be long. It needs to prove the date did not pass unnoticed by everyone but them. Many supporters fear that mentioning the date will ruin a good day. In reality, the grieving person is already thinking about it, usually for days beforehand. Your message does not introduce the sadness. It ends the loneliness of carrying it in secret.

> *"I know Saturday is the day your mom died. I have been thinking about her, and about you. I am here this weekend, for talking, for company, or for leaving you in peace. All three count."*

Saying Their Name Months Later

Everything in Part Two about saying the name matters twice as much in month eight as it did in week one. Later on, the grieving person has often stopped bringing their loved one up, not because they think of them less, but because they have learned that the room goes quiet when they do. You can reopen that door with almost no effort. Mention them in ordinary conversation. Tell the small story when it surfaces. Ask a question about them when you genuinely wonder. Each time you do, you hand the grieving person a rare and precious thing: a moment where the person they lost gets to be present tense in somebody else's mind too. Few gifts cost less. Few are remembered longer.

Helping From Far Away

Distance limits your hands, but it does not limit your steadiness, and steadiness is the main thing. Build a rhythm and keep it: a text on the same day each week, a call on Sunday afternoons, a card that arrives for no reason. Predictability is its own comfort, because the grieving person stops wondering whether everyone has forgotten. Use delivery for the practical side: groceries sent to the door, a meal arriving on the hard date, flowers in the month with no occasion at all. Remember out loud in your messages, by name, with specifics, the way you would across a kitchen table. And when you do visit, plan it like support rather than tourism: arrive ready to do chores, run errands, and sit quietly, and let your presence lower the weight of the house instead of adding a guest to it.

When Their Grief Looks Different From Yours

Sooner or later, the person you are supporting will grieve in a way that surprises you. Some people go quiet and private. Some get busy and brisk and seem, from the outside, almost untouched. Some laugh at the funeral and cry in the grocery store three months later. Some are angry, at circumstances, at the world, sometimes at you, for reasons that are not really about you. None of these styles is the correct one, and none is a verdict on how much they loved the person who died. Resist measuring their grief against your own experience, or against the version you expected to see. Your only real task is to support the grieving person in front of you, in the style they actually have, on the day they are actually having.

Not Taking It Personally

Support long enough and some of it will bounce off. Messages will go unanswered for weeks. Invitations will be declined, sometimes at the last minute. A sharp word may land on you that belonged to the pain and not to you at all. This is the moment where many good supporters quietly quit, feeling unappreciated or shut out. Try to read it differently. An unanswered text is usually a measure of their exhaustion, not your worth, and it almost always still helped to receive it. Keep your tone steady, keep your offers free of debt, and never present a grieving person with a bill for gratitude. If you are hurt, take that hurt to another friend, not back to them. The supporter who can absorb a few rough weeks without keeping score is the one who is still there, trusted and close, when the fog finally begins to lift.

YOUR TURN

My Plan to Show Up

Support that depends on memory and good intentions tends to fade by month two. Support written down has a chance. Fill this in now, while this guide is open, and put the dates in your real calendar before you close it.

The person I am supporting, and who they lost (names matter; write them both)

The dates I will put in my calendar (the day they died, their birthday, anniversaries, hard holidays)

The specific help I will offer this week (a task, a day, and a time, not a general offer)

Words I can borrow when I do not know what to say (copy one script from this guide in your own hand)

My check in rhythm (how often I will text or call, and on which day)

One memory of their loved one I want to share (so their name keeps being spoken)

My plan for month six (what I will do when everyone else has gone quiet)

How I will help from far away, if distance is part of this (a rhythm of texts, deliveries, remembered dates)

Keep this card for yourself, and know that you can also share these lines with the person you are supporting. **If you are ever in crisis, please reach out right away.** You can call or text the **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline** at **988** anywhere in the United States, or reach the **Crisis Text Line** by texting **HOME** to **741741**. Both are free, confidential, and answered by people who are there to listen, day or night.

Thank you for being the kind of person who reads a guide like this one. The person you love may never find the words to tell you what your steadiness meant, especially in the months when words were scarce. From someone who has been on the receiving end, please believe it anyway: the showing up counted, the name spoken counted, the quiet month six text counted most of all. Keep going. You are doing a sacred, ordinary, unforgettable thing.

With love, always