

SUPPORTING A LOVED ONE WHO IS GRIEVING

We all experience grief at some time in our lives. However, this topic is hardly discussed in society, which often leads people to feel that grieving is shameful, weak, or embarrassing. Grief is entirely normal, and in fact, it's a natural emotional response to trauma such as losing someone or something important to us.

There is no one way that grief is experienced. Grief can be expressed as sadness, shock, denial, numbness, blame, guilt, or realisation.

No two people experience grief in the same way or order.

There was a misleading theory that came out in 1969 by a Swiss-American psychiatrist named Elizabeth Kubler-Ross that believed that everyone who experiences grief will experience it in the seven predictable stages outlined in that specific order.

Grief is usually the opposite of orderly stages, but it is a journey filled with lows, highs, and setbacks with no set timeframe.

The seven stages of grief theory has been detrimental for many individuals as they thought if they were not experiencing grief in these seven stages that, there was something wrong with their coping mechanisms resulting in internalised stigma and self- **responsibilisation**.

Now we know what grief is, and there is no right way to grieve; how can we support ourselves and others to grieve?

Allow those who are experiencing grief to feel their feelings

Often, when someone is grieving, we tend to avoid the individual feeling uncomfortable emotions by avoiding talking about the subject.

However, it is essential for the person who is experiencing grief to know their loss has been acknowledged and isn't shameful to talk about.

Let the individual express their loss how they please; this may change daily. Sometimes they may need a shoulder to cry on, other days they may need to vent, some days sit in silence, and other days share memories.

We must be present in this time of grief and allow them to experience their grief in a supportive environment.

Sitting with the uncomfortable

When supporting someone through their grief it can be helpful to be aware of your own reactions and triggers when holding another person's grief.



FAMILIES OF VETERANS GUILD

Remaining aware of your own reactions, bias, assumptions can enable you to identify your own boundaries and needs whilst holding space for grief.

This enables the person you're supporting to feel heard and held without judgement.

This might look like listening with your body and mind avoiding filling the silence with statements or jumping to problem solving.

Allow the grief to be unresolved in all its uncertainty listening deeply with empathy to the lived experience of the person you are sitting with enabling healing and insight to take place.

Brene Brown refers to this as:

"extending a hand with heartfelt compassion."



Provide ongoing support

It is likely that when someone has just lost something or someone close to them, many people will offer to support them.

But after a while, this support will fade, and they will likely feel alone.

Offering ongoing support by staying in touch, dropping in, or sending letters will be very valuable to someone undergoing a period of intense grief.



Support networks

Talking to others with shared experience who are also in the same boat as the person experiencing grief, such as other families that may have lost a loved one from serving, gives individuals the opportunity to relate to others going through a similar experience and not feel so alone.

"One day you will tell your story of how you've overcome what you're going through now, and it will become part of someone else's survival guide"
Brene Brown.