

Tools for Supporting Community Members Who Are Grieving

Part of “The Grayness of Grief” workshop

By Natalie Rothstein

- **Show Empathy:** Let the community member know you’re there for them (grief can be very isolating and make it difficult for people to say that they need support).
- **Ask:** When it’s comfortable, ask them what support looks like for them.
- **Be thoughtful of language.**
 - Harsh language around death can be very painful for people who are grieving.
 - Particularly challenging words: killed, murder, committed suicide.
 - More comfortable words: passed away, lost their life, died by suicide.
- **Be sensitive to triggers.**
 - Grief is gray and different things may trigger people to feel different intense emotions – even though the triggers may not make sense or be clear to others.
- **Checking in:** Regularly ask the person “How are you, today?” – the emphasis on today is important because each day can feel different.
- **Permission:** Give yourself permission not to know what to say – we won’t always have the answers and there isn’t usually a solution, listening and providing space for someone to feel supported is often incredibly helpful.
- **You’re not expected to be a therapist:** If supporting community members are grieving, your role is not to be their therapist – it is to be their friend, counselor or co-counselor. Keeping these tips in mind can help navigate how to fill the role that makes the most sense for you.
- **Follow their lead:** Everyone’s grieving process looks different, give room to follow the person’s lead and notice where they are at.