

Ways to Support a Grieving Friend or Family Member Especially After a Loss to Addiction or Overdose

This resource is for educational support only and does not replace therapy, diagnosis, or clinical treatment.

Say Something

- Acknowledge the loss directly. Try: "I'm so sorry. I can't imagine what you're going through, but I'm here for you."
- Avoid minimizing the loss or offering clichés like "They're in a better place." If unsure what to say, be honest: "I don't know what to say, but I want to support you."

Be Present

- Grief isn't something to fix; it's something to witness.
- Offer space or companionship without pressure: "Would you like company or some time alone?"
- Let the grieving person lead conversations about their loved one.

Offer Practical Help

- "I'm at the store, what can I pick up for you?"
- "Can I bring dinner this week?"
- "Would it help if I handled some calls or messages for you?"

Speak Well About the Person Who Died

- Use their name, not just "they" or "the deceased."
- Avoid stigmatizing language like "junkie" or "they brought this on themselves."
- Acknowledge the person's full identity, their passions, dreams, and life beyond addiction.

Stay With Them Beyond the First Weeks

- Grief does not follow a timeline. Set reminders to check in after the initial shock has passed.
- Reach out on birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays with a simple message of support.

How to Care for Yourself Too

- It's okay to say, "I'm here, but I also need rest."
- Check in with your own emotions. Talk to someone if you're feeling overwhelmed.
- Practice grounding techniques, journaling, or quiet reflection to release emotional tension.
- Being present doesn't mean solving or fixing.

Encouragement for You

- You are making a difference just by showing up.
- You don't need perfect words. Your presence matters most.
- You're allowed to rest and grieve, too.

Sources

- Doka, K. J. (2002). *Disenfranchised Grief: Recognizing Hidden Sorrow*.
- Center for Prolonged Grief, Columbia University (<https://prolongedgrief.columbia.edu>)
- What's Your Grief (<https://whatsyourgrief.com>)
- SAMHSA Grief Resources (<https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/how-to-cope/grief>)

