

 Manchester Grief Coach

What to Say to Someone Who Is Grieving

And what not to say, what to send,
and how to keep showing up.

A short guide from Steve at Manchester Grief Coach

Keep it simple and true. "I'm so sorry" is enough, and so is "I don't know what to say, but I'm here." Use their person's name, offer specific help rather than "let me know if you need anything," and avoid anything that tries to make the loss smaller. Then keep checking in, long after the funeral.

Most people who get this wrong aren't unkind. They're just unprepared, and nobody ever showed them how. This is the plain version: what tends to land well, what to avoid, and how to keep showing up after everyone else goes quiet.

What do grieving people want to hear?

Something short and true is almost always better than something clever. What people remember afterwards is rarely the exact words. It's who turned up, and who went quiet. A few things that tend to land well:

- "I'm so sorry."
- "I don't know what to say, but I'm here."
- "I'm so sorry about your mum. I'll miss her too."
- "You don't have to reply, I just wanted you to know I'm thinking of you."
- "There's no right way to do this. However you're feeling is OK."

Use their person's name. A lot of bereaved people worry that the person they've lost will be forgotten, or that everyone is avoiding the subject to spare them. Hearing the name, or a small memory, usually lands as a relief rather than a wound.

What should you not say?

Some phrases, however kindly meant, tend to land badly. Most of them try to make the loss smaller or tidier. The alternatives just stay with it.

Instead of...	Try...
"Everything happens for a reason."	"I'm so sorry this happened."
"They're in a better place."	"I wish they were still here."
"At least you had them for so long."	"I know how much you loved them."
"I know exactly how you feel."	"I can't imagine what this is like for you."
"Let me know if you need anything."	"I'm dropping dinner round on Thursday. Is that OK?"
"You're being so strong."	"You don't have to be OK."
"Time heals."	"I'm here, however long this takes."

What's a good message to send?

Short, warm and specific. It doesn't need to be well written. A few that work:

- "I'm so sorry about [name]. No need to reply, I just want you to know I'm thinking of you."
- "I've got no words, but I love you and I'm here."
- "I'm going to the shops tomorrow. Can I drop anything round? A yes or no is fine."
- "Still here, still thinking of you. No need to answer."

That last one matters more than people realise. Messages tend to pour in during the first week and then stop, so one that arrives a month or a year later often means the most.

How can I help in practical ways?

"Let me know if you need anything" is kind, but it hands the grieving person a job: working out what they need, then asking for it. Most people won't. A specific offer is far easier to say yes to — think meals, the school run, the bins, a lift to an appointment. Say what you'll do and when.

The admin after a death is relentless, and it lands at the moment people can least manage it. You can make calls for them, sit with them while they make their own, or keep a list of what's been done and what hasn't.

How do I listen without trying to fix it?

You can't fix this, and trying to is tiring for both of you. The most useful thing is usually to listen and not steer. Let them cry, go quiet, get angry, or talk about something else entirely, and don't rush to fill the silences. Expect to hear the same story more than once — that's part of how people take in something that doesn't make sense yet.

How do I keep supporting them in the months after?

Support tends to arrive in a rush in the first couple of weeks and then fall away after the funeral, just as the reality is setting in. Being the person who's still there at three months is worth a great deal.

Put the date of the death, their person's birthday and any anniversaries in your calendar, and get in touch on or around them. Keep inviting them to things, and make it obvious there's no pressure: "come if you feel like it, and bail at the last minute if you don't."

If you're worried about them, it's worth gently suggesting they see their GP if, months on, they're barely functioning — not eating, not sleeping, unable to work, or if the grief seems frozen rather than moving at all. If they talk about not wanting to be here, or harming themselves, take it seriously and don't leave them alone with it. Samaritans are free to call on [116 123](tel:116123), any time of day or night. For urgent medical help call **NHS 111**, and in an emergency call **999**.

Supporting someone through grief is draining, especially if you're grieving the same person. You don't have to be their only support, and you don't have to get it right every time. Showing up imperfectly is still showing up.

I'm a grief coach, and I run a six week course called **Life After Loss** for adults working through a bereavement, online, in a small group or one to one. You can find all of it at manchestergriefcoach.com.

If their loss is recent, [The First Few Months](#) is a short, free companion guide for the person grieving.

[Book a free, no-pressure chat](#)

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