



How a Compassionate Communities Supporters can help.

Death dying bereavement and loss, affects us all, but it's something we don't talk about very much, so when it happens (as it inevitably will) we are unsure what to do, how to help ourselves and how to help others.

In the next section we will look at some of the difficulties people affected by death dying bereavement and loss might face, and how you can have the compassion and confidence to help them.



Unfamiliar words

If death, dying and bereavement are something you've not experienced before, the language used may be unfamiliar, you may hear the terms, 'life limiting illness', 'end of life care' and 'palliative care'; but be unsure of what they mean, here is a brief explanation.

- A life limiting illness or condition is one from which there is no reasonable hope of a cure, and that from which the person is expected to die.
- When someone is diagnosed as terminally ill, it usually means they are expected to live for six months or less, but some people may live longer.
- End of life care helps people to live as well as possible and to die with dignity; it usually involves professionals such as doctors, community nurses, physiotherapists, etc..
- Palliative care forms part of end of life care. Palliative care is given if an illness can't be cured; its aim is to make a person as comfortable as possible, manage symptoms and pain. It is holistic (treats the whole of the person's needs) so it also might include a person's emotional, social and spiritual needs and those of their carers and family too. Palliative care can be given at other times as well as end of life, to help people cope with their illness. Sometimes people stay at a hospice or hospital to receive palliative treatment, such as pain relief, after which they are able to return home.



How can you help?

When a serious illness or death becomes known in a community, people can feel at a loss about what to do to help.

In addition, very often the person or people affected often don't know what help they might need in the weeks and months to come, they are often too overwhelmed by the diagnosis or loss.

It can be helpful to offer help with specific tasks; they don't have to be large tasks, just things that help take off the pressures of everyday stuff, so they can save their energies for what matters most to them at this time.

Things like shopping, putting the bins out, offering to drive to appointments, clearing paths of snow, walking the dog, cutting the grass, making a casserole, baking a cake, collecting prescriptions.



'When my husband was poorly, it really helped to know a neighbour would pick up anything we needed from the chemists, when she was meeting her grandchildren from school'.

Fear of 'saying the wrong thing' or 'intruding' can also make people hold back from offering to help. A way around that is to try sending a note or a text offering help if you feel unsure.



'John and I knew he wasn't going to get better, and that he'd never be well enough to get up to the allotments again, but it was really bothering him, that all the things he'd been growing all summer, were going to waste; silly really when you think about it. Then they set up a little rota at the

allotments, to see to his plot, and they even brought down some of his runner beans and courgettes, it really lifted his spirits.'

Stay in touch

Even if your initial offer of help is declined, it's a good idea to ask again at a later date, things can change very quickly.



'After my husband John died, I had lots of help from family and friends, but it was a few months later when I came unstuck, everyone seemed to have gone back to their lives, and I felt very alone. I felt overwhelmed by the tasks John used to do. I was so grateful when one of his friends from the choir he used to sing with came and asked if I wanted him to check all was well with car, the tyres and the antifreeze and everything. It was such a relief.'

Bereavement and grief

Grief is a normal reaction to loss; the loss may be someone you love or care for deeply, it may be a pet, loss of a job or home that triggers feelings of grief. When someone is bereaved their life can change in many, often unexpected ways. There is no time limit to grief, no right time to 'get over it' or 'move on', it affects everyone differently.

No emotion is off limits in grief, people can be surprised to feel emotions such as anger, relief, jealousy, as well as sadness; sometimes all of those emotions in one day! Many people can be left feeling physically different too, and experience sleeplessness, difficulty in concentrating and loss of appetite.



'After my wife died, I wasn't eating very well to be honest, I didn't have much appetite, I couldn't seem to get it together to make a proper meal for myself. It was lovely when a neighbour brought round a couple of extra portions of casserole they'd made, and nice to have someone at my door, even if it was just for a few minutes.'

Don't be frightened to talk, let the grieving person set the pace, and be aware of their reactions to guide you. It takes time to find a 'new way of being' after a bereavement. There is no need to feel embarrassed if they become upset, don't panic if they cry! Just give them however much time they need to gather themselves; they will say or show you whether

they want to carry on talking, or if they have had is enough for one day.



'The young couple across the road, noticed my security light wasn't working and asked if I needed help to change the bulb. It was such a relief, I'd been feeling quite nervous about being home alone since my husband died, it reassured me to have the light fixed. They are such lovely young people, I'd not stopped to talk with them before. We help each other now, I look after their cat when they are away!'

If you'd like to know more about how to help someone affected by grief, [click here](#) (opens new website).