

What to say when someone dies

Finding the right thing to say
to someone who is bereaved



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Finding the right thing to say at a difficult time

Losing someone we care about is one of the most challenging and upsetting experiences any of us can face. And knowing what to say to someone in that situation can be very hard.

In this guide, we'll help you find the right thing to say to offer comfort and condolence to someone going through that difficult time.

Whether you want to know what to write in a card or what to say at a funeral service or memorial, we can help you find the right way to express your sympathy and offer support.

We also look at what to say when someone is grieving the loss of their father, mother, child, husband or wife, friend or colleague.

Sometimes, because we don't know what to say, we may be tempted to say nothing at all. But that isn't going to give someone in mourning the comfort we'd like to offer.

Of course, there are no words that can stop someone from grieving or take away their sorrow – but our words can give them solace. A sincere, heartfelt expression of sympathy can offer real comfort and just show someone we care, that we're thinking of them, that we acknowledge their pain and that we're 'there for them'.

Let's look at how we can do just that.

Simple words, strong feelings

One of the simplest (yet most powerful) things you can say to someone who is grieving is, "I'm so sorry for your loss."

These six words convey sympathy and let the person know that you acknowledge their pain and are there to offer support. Speak from the heart and avoid clichés or platitudes that may come across as insincere or dismissive of the person's grief.

Those six words may be useful if you're ever given the news of someone's death out of the blue. Finding the right words to say right there and then can be very difficult.



Instead of saying, "I know how you feel," which can minimise the individuality of their experience, you can also consider saying something like, "I can't imagine what you're going through, but I'm here for you."

This acknowledges the depth of their pain while also offering your presence and support without judgment.

Validate the person's feelings and let them know that it's okay to grieve in their own way and on their own timeline.

Avoid phrases like "You should be strong", or "Time heals all wounds," as they can unintentionally pressure the person to suppress their emotions or rush the grieving process. Instead, offer reassurance by saying, "It's okay to feel however you're feeling right now. Take all the time you need to grieve and know that I'm here to support you."

Simple statements of sorrow

When you learn that someone is grieving, you might easily say something like “How are you?” – but if you think about it, how is the person supposed to react to such a question? Often, they might just say, “I’m fine” even though they really aren’t.

You could try ‘How was this morning?’ or ‘How did (an activity you know they’re doing) go?’ so you’re focusing on how a period of time or event has gone for them, rather than how they are. It could also get them talking about their feelings more.

If “I’m so sorry for your loss” isn’t right for you, here are ten easy alternatives you might prefer:

- 1 My deepest sympathies to you and your family.
- 2 I don’t know what to say, but this must be very hard for you.
- 3 You are in my thoughts and prayers.
- 4 We will all miss (name); she touched so many of our lives.
- 5 Our love and support will always be here for you.
- 6 They will be so missed.
- 7 I’m very sorry to hear this tragic news.
- 8 If you want to talk, I’m here at any time.
- 9 I’m thinking of you at this heart-breaking time.
- 10 (Name) was a wonderful person, I’m so sorry they’re gone.

More than words – six other ways to help

As well as offering words of condolence, there are often other ways you can really be a comfort for someone who is grieving.

Listening, for instance. Sometimes, the most meaningful thing you can do is simply be present and offer a listening ear. Encourage the person to share their stories and emotions about the person they have lost.

You can say something like, “If you ever want to talk, I’m here to listen.”

Sharing memories or favourite anecdotes can also be a meaningful way to honour their life and provide comfort. If you knew the person who has died, you can reminisce about the times you shared together or highlight their positive qualities and contributions. For example, you could say, “I’ll always remember [name] for their kindness and sense of humour. They brought so much joy to everyone around them.”



Offering **practical support** can also be incredibly helpful for someone who is grieving. You can ask if there's anything they need assistance with, such as running errands, preparing meals, or taking care of household chores. If they don't feel up to going to the shops for example, you could do that for them, or perhaps go together. Simply knowing that they have a support system to lean on during this difficult time can provide a sense of comfort and relief.

Attending the memorial or send-off is another way to show your support and solidarity. If you're unsure of what to say in person, **physical contact** such as offering a hug, a handshake, or a simple touch on the shoulder can convey your condolences and empathy.

You can also express your sympathy through **something you give**, such as a thoughtful card, letter, or bouquet of flowers, accompanied by a heartfelt message of support and remembrance.



Grief is a deeply personal and complex experience, and everyone processes it differently. Some may find solace in talking openly about their feelings and memories, while others may prefer quiet reflection or solitude. Respect the person's wishes and boundaries, and let them know that you're there for them whenever they're ready to reach out for support.

In addition to offering emotional support, it's essential to take care of your own well-being when supporting someone who is grieving. Witnessing the pain of loss can be emotionally draining, so make sure to prioritise self-care and seek support from friends, family, or a mental health professional if needed.

10 inspiring quotes on death and grief

Perhaps they are not stars in the sky, but rather openings where our loved ones shine down to let us know they are happy.

Eskimo legend

Given a choice between grief and nothing, I'd choose grief.

William Faulkner

There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues.

Washington Irving

You never know how strong you are until being strong is the only option.

Bob Marley

Grief is the price we pay for love.

Queen Elizabeth

To live in hearts we leave behind is not to die.

Thomas Campbell

A great soul serves everyone all the time. A great soul never dies. It brings us together again and again.

Maya Angelou

I can't think of a more wonderful thanksgiving for the life I have had than that everyone should be jolly at my funeral.

Admiral Lord Mountbatten

How lucky am I to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard.

AA Milne

Death is nature's way of saying, 'Your table is ready.'

Robin Williams

What to write in a sympathy card

Writing a sympathy card can be an emotional experience, and putting pen to paper can feel very challenging. But there is no need to put pressure on yourself, you just need to be open and sincere. Here are a few suggestions to help.

Sympathy messages for the loss of a father

The death of a parent is always going to be a significant loss, no matter how old you are, how close or how complicated the relationship was. It is also one of the most common bereavements to experience.

For many, fathers are a person to look up to, lean on, and go to for advice. It can be tough for someone to lose such a strong, anchoring presence in their life.

When writing sympathy messages, recall pleasant memories or retell a story. By doing this, you're remembering how they lived rather than dwelling on their death. Here are some of the things you might say:

Your father was an extremely caring and kind man. I know that no matter where you are, he will always be watching over you.

.....

A father's guiding hand always sits on the shoulder of his children.

.....

What a wonderful relationship you had, bringing each other such joy.

.....

I will never forget the way your father smiled and the way he loved you with every piece of his heart.

Words of sympathy for the loss of a mother

Losing your mother is always going to be very hard. Often a confidant and a shoulder to cry on, many people never really get over the loss of their mother.

But it can be a great comfort for someone to hear how much you admired and cared for their mother. Use your words of condolence to extend your caring thoughts and admiration. Here are some words you can use for inspiration.

There is no one in this world like your mother. She was a special woman, and she will be with you always.

.....

My deepest condolences to you and your family during this time. Your mother was an amazing woman, and she will truly be missed.

.....

The bond of love between a mother and child is unbreakable. She is with us all still in love, memory, and family. Know we are here to support you all through everything that may come.

Condolence messages for the loss of a child

Losing a child is unimaginable for most of us. There is perhaps no more painful, devastating loss than this – and finding the right words to say to someone facing such a heartache is a huge challenge.

No words can mend bereaved parents' broken hearts, but your words can offer support when they need it most. Recalling a time when the child did something you remember, describing their personality, referring to the relationship you saw they had with their parents – your honest, heartfelt words show the child is not forgotten, that their life had meaning and that they will be remembered.

Some simple things you might add include:

While there are no words to express our sorrow, we are sending you love and prayers to sustain you during this dark time.

.....

Death leaves a heartache no one can heal. Love leaves a memory no one can steal.

.....

The love and joy that your child brought to the world will never be forgotten. We are thinking of you and your family during this tragic time.

A sympathy card for the loss of a husband or wife

In many cases, someone will have been with their spouse for longer than they've been with anyone else, and losing them can leave the partner feeling lost and alone. Writing a sympathy card to someone who has lost their spouse is your chance to let them know you are there for them.

Here are some examples of the things you might write:

I cannot fully express the sorrow I feel for you at this time. I am thinking about you always, and I am just a call away.

.....

Nothing quite compares to the love of a spouse. I want you to know that I am thinking about you and am here for you always.

.....

No one can ever replace the amazing person that your spouse was. My thoughts are with you during this time.

Comforting words for the loss of a friend or colleague

It can be challenging for a person to go from seeing someone every day to not at all. They may feel a sense of confusion or instability when losing a colleague or friend. It will be comforting for them to know that you acknowledge their loss. Here are some comforting words for the loss of a friend.

Words, no matter how kind, can't mend your heartache. However, those who care for you wish you comfort and peace.

.....

I was so sorry to hear about your friend's passing. I hope that you know that I am here for you whenever you need it.

.....

The comfort of having a friend may be taken away, but the memories of that friendship will endure forever.

Messages to avoid in a sympathy card

There are lots of things you can choose to write in a sympathy card, but at the same time, there are phrases you might use that are well intentioned but which might be taken the wrong way, especially when emotions are raw. Things to avoid include:

I know how you feel.

We all experience and process grief differently, and it can seem to diminish someone's feelings by suggesting you fully understand how it feels for them.

He/she was so young.

Saying this can be a painful reminder.

Everything happens for a reason.

This can feel dismissive, or if assigning blame for the death.

Your grief will pass.

A bereaved person should have permission to mourn, and this could be taken to suggesting that they soon will or should, 'get over it'.

If you're worried about saying the wrong thing, it's best to keep your message of condolence short. Sending a card might seem like a simple act, but it lets the recipient know you care.

Popular sympathy poems

A touching or beautiful poem can help a person know that others have felt this kind of grief too, reducing the sense of emotional isolation. Here are a few examples:

'Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep'

Mary Frye

'Give What's Left of Me Away'

Merrit Malloy

'If Roses Grow in Heaven'

Dolores Garcia

'Let Me Go'

Christine Rossetti

'Nothing Gold Can Stay'

Robert Frost



Sending condolences with a song

Music is a driving force in many peoples' lives and can also provide comfort for those experiencing a loved one's loss. If you can sing the song or have someone who can sing the song for you, that might be a lovely touch. Or you can play the song for them. Here are 10 ideas:

'Everybody Hurts'

REM

'Wind Beneath My Wings'

Bette Midler

'Candle in the Wind'

Elton John

'Tears in Heaven'

Eric Clapton

'Unchained Melody'

The Righteous Brothers

'My Heart Will Go On'

Celine Dion

'Angels'

Robbie Williams

'Bridge Over Troubled Water'

Simon & Garfunkel

'You'll Never Walk Alone'

Mahalia Jackson

'Over the Rainbow'

Eva Cassidy



What to say at the funeral

If you're attending a funeral service, it's appropriate to offer your sympathy to the family. A simple "I'm sorry for your loss" is fine if you don't know them very well.

However, it's often better if you can say something about the person who has passed away. Saying something personal that kindly remembers the person and what they meant to you is very much appreciated. Here are some examples of what to say at a funeral:

“

He will be missed by everyone that knew him.”

“

You and your family are in my thoughts and prayers.”

“

When you're ready, I'm here for you.”

“

I'm so sorry you've lost your Dad, he was a lovely man, and we'll miss him very much.”

Your words matter, because they're from you

Finding the right words to say when someone dies can be hard, but offering sincere condolences and support can be an immense comfort to those who are grieving. What's important isn't saying the 'right' thing so much as saying something – something simple, heartfelt, true.

Expressing what you felt about the person who's died, showing that you care for the person who is bereaved – that's what matters, not trying to be eloquent or poetic or writing a great eulogy.

Approach the situation with empathy, compassion, and sensitivity, and let the person know that you're there to listen, to support, and to honour the memory of their loved one.

Just be present, offer your heartfelt condolences and let the person know that they're not alone in their grief. That is the most wonderful thing you can do to support them.





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