

Supportive language to use when talking about death and dying

Having conversations about death and dying is important, and we're here to help you in having these. See below for our suggestions on phrases and words which from our experience and training, we find most supportive.

<i>Instead of...</i>	<i>Try</i>	<i>Why?</i>
'Lost, gone to sleep, passed away'	'Dead, died, deceased'	<p>Language such as lost or gone away can be very confusing, especially for young people (dependant on their developmental stage). Young children can struggle to understand the permanency of death. Therefore, they may feel confused or anxious about where the deceased person has gone and question why they can't go with them.</p> <p>Language such as 'gone to sleep' can also cause anxiety in young people, some young people worry that they may go to sleep and never wake up when this language is used.</p> <p>Clear, concise language can help people understand the permanency of death and process death over time.</p>
'Committed suicide'	'Death by suicide'	<p>There are lots of negative connotations linked to the word 'commit', such as committing a crime. This in turn can reinforce the negative taboos around suicide e.g. the person who has died has done something wrong for ending their life. This can be very conflicting for people if their family member or significant person died by suicide. We must remember that until 50 years ago suicide was a crime in England and Wales.</p>
'Loved one'	'Important person' or 'significant person'	<p>Some people may have had a difficult relationship with the deceased person before they died, therefore it can be distressing for this person to be referred to as a 'loved one'.</p> <p>It is also suggests to people that they have to think of this person in a loving manner because they have died, which is not always the case.</p>

		It is normal for people to feel feelings of relief and anger if they had a difficult relationship with the deceased e.g. an abusive relationship.
'I know how you feel'	'I can't imagine how you are feeling. I am here to listen'	<p>Suggesting you know exactly how that person feels can invalidate their individual experience of grief. No one can understand how they are truly feeling as they have not experienced what they are.</p> <p>Instead, we need to sit alongside people and offer them a safe space to explore how they are feeling, without judgement.</p>
'They wouldn't want you to be sad'	'It's OK to feel what you are feeling'	<p>There should be no expectations of how a person will react to grief, all people process grief differently and we need to emphasize that any emotions they're experiencing are okay and normal.</p> <p>Suggesting the deceased wouldn't want the person to feel sad can also lead to feelings of guilt, despite this being a normal reaction. We must allow people to have a safe space to express any emotions they need to.</p>
'You need to move on' and 'Time is a great healer'	' I am here to listen for as long as you need' Or 'You don't get over grief, you learn how to live alongside it...'	<p>Grief is an individual journey, it is important that we reassure people that there are no timescales or time frames that their grief will fit into.</p> <p>We often speak to people about 'growing around their grief' and learning to 'live alongside it', as they may never 'get over' the death of a significant person.</p>

Find more information and supportive resources for **having conversations about death and dying** at <https://www.herriothh.org.uk/talking-about-dying/>

Discover how our **Herriot Hospice Homecare Wellbeing team** can support you in having conversations and thinking about the future:
<https://www.herriothh.org.uk/how-we-help/living-with-terminal-illness/wellbeing-network/>

Find out about Just 'B', our specialist bereavement support and emotional wellbeing service: <https://justb.org.uk/>