

# HOW TO

# CREATE A SAFE SPACE FOR SOMEONE WHO IS GRIEVING

People's willingness to be vulnerable often depends on feeling safe. Creating a safe environment requires empathy, hospitality, and the right intentions. When we are empathic and try to understand someone's needs, then we can provide a safe space for those hurting to be authentic and vulnerable.

## 1 CREATE TRUST

Trust changes in new situations. Someone's ability to be vulnerable, share openly, lose a sense of control, and feel exposed is dependent on them feeling safe. Creating a safe environment starts with body language, ability to listen without interruption, not making it about you, and not judging. These are critical components to establishing trust.

## 2 NO JUDGMENT

Give people the space to share without judgment, advice, or unsolicited feedback.

## 3 NO INTERRUPTING

Give the person time to share as much or as little as s/he wants. Don't interrupt with questions, your own story, or advice.

## 4 BE EMPATHIC

Listen with the intent of trying to understand the person's perspective.

## 5 BE REAL

Death and grief are hard. But, we don't have to pretend like we are corny psychologists on a Hollywood TV set. Be your real and authentic self. You can say, "This sucks so bad." You can laugh and cry with someone. You can make jokes they'd find appropriate. You should be you so they can be who they are.

## 6 BE OPEN

Be accepting of outbursts and outlandish comments. Maybe the person needs to make a crude or poorly timed joke about the death. Maybe s/he needs to crumble for a few minutes. When you are open and welcome to whatever comes your way, the person has permission to be in the moment and do whatever is needed.

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### 7 CREATE SILENCE

Words are not always our friend. Silence makes some of us uncomfortable, but it is an incredible tool that creates space for more sharing. Silence gives time to process. It acknowledges that words can't make it better, and it honors the intensity of a moment or story.

### 8 KEEP CONFIDENTIALITY

Assure the person that what is said to you will stay with you, and keep that promise. Don't repeat, allude to, or go telling people something that was shared in confidence.

### 9 INVITE SHARING

If you are open, you will naturally invite more sharing. By expressing your interest in their wellbeing and attempting to understand and empathize, the person will feel that they can keep sharing and be vulnerable. Encourage them along the way. See our [communications tip sheet](#) for more on this.

### 10 BE VULNERABLE

It's okay to be vulnerable and to be moved by what you hear. Tears are okay, they show you care. But, don't make the person have to start taking care of you, that's not helpful.

### 11 DON'T MAKE IT ABOUT YOU

...because it's not.