



# PATIENT SAFETY TOOL BOX TALKS®

## EFFECTIVE CARE & SUPPORT

### END OF LIFE CARE BEREAVEMENT



v1.0

This patient safety tool box talk is based on the NICE<sup>1</sup> Guidelines and Quality Standards for End of Life Care in Hospitals (Irish Hospice Foundation)

#### Tips for a person who is Bereaved:

If you have experienced a loss, there are a number of things which will help you as you grieve:

1. **Allow yourself to experience the feelings** which come with bereavement even if, at times, they are difficult
2. **Be gentle with yourself.** Your energy may be low for a while so do not place too many demands on yourself.
3. **Don't rush things.** You are trying to come to terms with a major upheaval in your life so give yourself permission to take things a bit easier. In general, it is best to put off making major decisions such as moving home or changing jobs for at least six months to a year.
4. **Look after your physical health.** You may find that you have lost your appetite. However, it is important that you eat healthily. Many people find that eating little and often helpful.
5. **Try and get some exercise.** Even a small walk each day can be beneficial.
6. **Make sure you get enough rest and sleep.** This will help you to avoid becoming run down and more likely to pick up infections.
7. **Seek out support from others who are willing to listen.** Talking is important as it helps you express what you are feeling. Try to find one or two people with whom you can simply be yourself and who will allow you to talk when you need to

#### How do I support someone who is experiencing a bereavement ?

1. Communicate with people affected by death in a sensitive way
2. Offer support immediately that is appropriate to their needs and preferences
3. Staff are affected by bereavement too— be aware of your own needs and seek support

#### What is bereavement ?

Bereavement is when we lose something or someone that is important to us. This experience can be especially difficult when someone close to us dies. Making sense of the loss and learning to live without that person is the work of grieving. Grieving is a process rather than an event.

Everyone's loss is different, therefore, everyone's grief is different. Grief can be hard at times and it is completely normal to experience a wide range of feelings which can include shock, disbelief, confusion, sadness, loneliness and anger.



People who are bereaved can need different types of support. These can be divided in to three levels as per NICE<sup>1</sup> Guidelines



**Level 3 Therapy Support** is specialised support provided by professionals (psychologists, psychotherapists, counsellors and doctors) and is appropriate for people who develop complications or become stuck in their grieving process (approximately 10-15%)

**Level 2 Extra Support** is a service usually delivered by trained volunteers who have themselves been bereaved. It may also be provided through a hospital or hospice. (Approximately 25% of people who are bereaved require Level 2 support)

**Level 1 General Support** applies to the majority of people who are grieving and involves providing information on the grieving process, practical help with tasks and social support. Family, friends and colleagues will provide much of this support. (Approximately 65% of people who are bereaved require Level 1 support)

<sup>1</sup>National\_Institute\_for\_Clinical\_Excellence\_NICE. (2004). Services for families and carers. Improving supportive and palliative care for adults with cancer. The Manual. In London: Author.

# Talking to people who are bereaved

Talking to people who are bereaved is not always easy, but if done with compassion it can make a big difference. Remember:

## What to say

Don't worry about trying to find the perfect thing to say - keep it simple  
e. g.:

- "I'm sorry to hear about Mary" or
- "Tom, I can't find the words to tell you how sorry I am"

More important than the words is your compassion



## What not to say

It is important not to say anything which minimises the loss for the person. E. g.:

"I heard your father died - we all have to go sometime, or he was very old"

Remember the person who is grieving is the expert on their grief



## Where can I get more information?

1. **Bereavement information leaflets:**  
Family Grief - Understanding Grief - Death of a partner etc. Contact: Irish Hospice Foundation (01) 6793188 or [www.hospicefoundation.ie](http://www.hospicefoundation.ie)
2. **Bereavement booklet:**  
[www.citizensinformationboard.ie](http://www.citizensinformationboard.ie) (search under bereavement)
3. **Quality Standards of End of Life Care:**  
Hospice Friendly Hospitals Program : [www.hospicefoundation.ie](http://www.hospicefoundation.ie) — Ph. 01 6793188
4. **Websites:**
  1. **[www.bereaved.ie](http://www.bereaved.ie)** - provides advice and information for bereaved people, those supporting them and professionals working with them.
  2. **[www.icbn.ie](http://www.icbn.ie)** - Irish Childhood Bereavement Network—provides information on supporting children who are bereaved