



Helping Older Adults through Loss

You would think that loss affects all of us—children, adults, and the elderly—in exactly the same way. But, grieving in older adults can be more difficult simply because of all the loss they have endured in the past.

Grief can be compounded by successive layers of loss making its effects stronger and more debilitating. According to grief experts, the top 5 ways you can help an older adult include:

1. Giving the person time. Sometimes older adults need more time to become aware of their feelings and express them. Sometimes they need more time to complete other activities as well. Giving an older person extra time shows that you are concerned and respectful of his or her needs.

2. Pointing out signs of sadness or changes in behavior. This may help the person become more aware of his or her feelings and make them feel more comfortable talking with you.

3. Spending time with the person. An older adult who is often alone can benefit from your company. Invite him or her to go for a walk or have a cup of coffee. Feelings of loneliness may last for a long time when an older adult has lost someone special, especially a spouse.

4. Talking about the loss. Ask the person to talk about his or her loss. Older people, especially those who have experienced several losses over a short period of time, are often helped by sharing memories of the ones they've lost.

5. Watching for signs of prolonged grieving or depression. If you have concerns that an older adult is having difficulty working through his or her grieving, talk with a health professional.

Remember, older adults often have more than one loss to deal with at a time so deciding to talk about each separately may also help the person feel less overwhelmed and more able to cope with their emotions.

Our website is rich with valuable resources to help you and your family support an older adult in your life. We invite you to visit the site, where you will have immediate access to a collection of articles and downloadable guides to help you help others at their time of need.