

How to Support a Grieving Friend This Holiday Season

The festive season can be a particularly painful time for those who are grieving – especially for anyone who has recently lost someone they love.

We have created this guide to offer gentle guidance on supporting a grieving friend, helping them feel cared for, understood and less alone at this sensitive time of year.

Keep checking in

- Grief can feel isolating – small gestures like a phone call, text or short visit can remind a person that they are not alone.
- Let your friend know you are thinking of them, especially as Christmas approaches.
- Offer to meet up and go for a walk in the fresh air if they feel up to it.
- Encourage your friend to look after themselves – ask if they would like a cooked meal or a grocery shop
- Offer to help with any funeral-related tasks if their loss is recent.

Start a conversation – and listen

- Ask a gentle, open-ended question like, “What would help you most right now?”
- Avoid asking “How are you?” as many people will respond with “I’m fine” to avoid sharing their true feelings.

- Listen carefully and try not to interrupt, be judgmental or compare it to other experiences.
- Your friend will need to express their emotions freely – even if crying might make you feel uncomfortable, it’s perfectly normal for someone grieving.
- Focus on empathy, not solutions.
- Thank them for sharing their feelings with you.

Be sensitive about Christmas

- Don’t avoid sending Christmas cards, but be sensitive to the situation.
- Acknowledge that this time of year may be especially difficult.
- Mention their loved one’s name and share a cherished memory if it feels appropriate.
- Use gentle phrases like: ‘I can’t imagine how much you must miss [name].’
- If you exchange gifts with your friend, consider a memorial gift or donating to charity in their loved one’s memory.
- Offer to light a candle, visit their loved one’s graveside, or sit together and look at their funeral tribute page.

Help your friend make plans

- Grief can make the holiday season feel overwhelming, and your friend may feel pressure to keep up appearances or act as if they are okay.
- Ask what they would really like to do and offer your support.
- Offer practical support – like doing their holiday shop, wrapping presents or even cooking their Christmas Day meal.
- If they have children, offer to look after them for a while so that your friend can make time for self-care or catch up on chores.
- If you're able to, extend a holiday invitation, but don't put any pressure on your friend to accept if they aren't feeling up to it.
- Extend holiday invitations, but make it clear that you absolutely understand if they aren't up for it.

Beyond the holidays

- Bear in mind that your grieving friend might need support ongoing and for more than one Christmas.
- Small gestures or messages beyond the festive period can provide ongoing comfort.

If the holiday season feels especially hard, you don't have to face it alone. East of England Co-op Funeral Services can help put you in touch with the charity [**AtaLoss**](#), which helps people who are grieving or supporting someone who's bereaved.

Call our 24-hour Careline on **0800 0744 362** or visit: [**www.eastofengland.coop/funerals/our-services/bereavement-support**](http://www.eastofengland.coop/funerals/our-services/bereavement-support)