

7 ways to talk to someone who is grieving

When someone has suffered a bereavement, it can be hard to know what to say. Here, Jane Harris and Jimmy Edmonds, The Good Grief Project founders, share what they have learned since the death of their son Josh



5 DON'T BE AFRAID TO TALK ABOUT OUR LOVED ONE OR SAY THEIR NAME.

We will not crumble or cry at the mention of their name – and even if we do, it's not you who has caused our tears. In any case, these tears will more likely be tears of joy that you have decided to share a memory with us. They are a kind of release, in the same way as laughter. More than anything, we want to talk about our loved one, to remember how they lived. Our greatest fear is when everyone stops talking about them, as though they never existed.

6 DO UNDERSTAND THAT SOMETIMES PEOPLE WILL HIDE THEIR GRIEF.

Grief is exhausting and it's not something we necessarily always want to share. The bereaved can become very good at putting on a mask – and the longer it has been since their loved one died, the better they may become at hiding their grief. When you see them, they may laugh and joke, but that may be a cover for what's really going on. At times, the person grieving feels like they are living in a parallel universe, and they may want to do so alone. Don't be offended if you feel shut out; it's not personal and it's not about you or something you have done wrong.

Grief affects us all differently. While some welcome kind gestures and the chance to talk about the person they have lost, others may shy away from offers of help and grieve privately, so it can be hard to know what to say.

Psychotherapist Jane Harris and documentary film editor and photographer Jimmy Edmonds know from first-hand experience that the complexities of grief are hard to navigate – both for the person grieving and those around them. In 2011, their son Josh, 22, died in a road accident in Vietnam. 'Our lives felt shattered – but our grief has come with many lessons,' they say. Here, they share their advice on how to approach conversations with those who are grieving.

2 DO THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK. It can be hard to know what to say – and it's okay to admit that. Trying to describe our loss is hard for us, too. Please don't say you understand unless you really do – we don't need you to interpret our grief.

3 DON'T RUN AWAY FROM OUR GRIEF. Grief is frightening – for you and for us. But avoidance is not the answer. If you've tried calling and had no answer, send an email or text. Let us know that you're always there so that when the time is right, we can call you.

Continuing our series on grief, we'd love to hear your comments and thoughts on the subject. Email us at prima@hearst.co.uk.

1 DON'T JUDGE OR MAKE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT HOW LONG WE SHOULD GRIEVE OR IN WHAT ORDER OR STAGES.

Everyone grieves differently. And don't ever ask a bereaved person to move on or find closure. Openings, yes. Closure, no. The reality is you don't stop loving your loved one after they have died. It's for us to decide how we get on with life.

4 DO ACCEPT WE MAY HAVE CHANGED. Grief's shock to the system can prompt a new way of looking at life. Our priorities may have changed, and we are finding ourselves again in what has become a very uncertain world. Have patience while we learn how to trust again; we may well act in ways that don't fit with the person you thought you knew and grief can be messy and angry.

7 DO SEE GRIEF AS A PERIOD OF GROWTH.

There is much to learn from grief, even benefits to be had. It is only through suffering and discomfort that we can see change in ourselves and growth in our understanding of others. • *When Words Are Not Enough: Creative Responses To Grief (Quickthorn Books)* by Jane Harris and Jimmy Edmonds is out now; thegoodgriefproject.co.uk