

FAMILY AND FRIENDS CAN HELP

The sudden death of a loved one is devastating. People's lives are turned upside down. They may feel shocked, angry, despairing, confused, guilty – and alone. Your support, caring and friendship are so important at this very difficult time.

Death is a difficult subject for us to talk about. Sometimes it is hard to know what to say or do. You may feel awkward, uncomfortable or even afraid. But don't let your feeling of helplessness keep you away from the bereaved person or family.

This brochure is designed to give you some guidelines about how you can support your friend or family member - your support and understanding **will** make a difference.

Call immediately after the tragedy, or as soon as you find out about the death.

If you can't make a personal call or visit, send a note. If you don't know what to say, you can just write 'thinking of you'.

Make sure they know you care. A few simple words, such as "I'm so sorry", or a hug may be all that is needed.

Offer to do something practical such as making a meal, answering the phone, doing the shopping or washing.

Encourage your friend to make their own decisions, including planning the funeral.

Remember all members of the family are grieving. Acknowledge the loss for all family members.

Do not hesitate to send a belated sympathy card or note if you failed to do so immediately. The family will appreciate being remembered even though your message may be late.

Say the name of the person who has died. Share your happy memories of that person with the bereaved family members.

Keep in touch on a regular basis

There may be times when your offers of help are refused. Try again later. If you feel awkward because you don't know what to do or say, be honest – "I don't know what to say ... is there anything I can do?"

Some things that will not be helpful

- Don't avoid talking about the person who has died. It may seem to the bereaved that you are denying that their loved one ever existed which can be very hurtful.
- Don't say "it could have been worse", or "they are in a better place".
- Don't use clichés such as "You must be strong" and "Life goes on".

Listen to your friend's story – over and over again. Listen without judging. Those who are bereaved will have intense feelings that are likely to include shock, numbness, anger, sadness, fear and guilt. You cannot change this or take their pain away but you can help them by being there, caring and listening.

Give your friend time to heal.

Intense sadness, anxiety, sleeplessness, anger, frustration, hopelessness, helplessness are to be expected after a sudden death. Don't expect that your friend or family member will be 'over it' in a few weeks or months. *It may take years.*

Remember birthdays, anniversaries and other special days. Be aware that the days leading up to these events may be particularly difficult times. Your friend will appreciate the fact that you have remembered these important days.

Take care of yourself

It can be draining to share another's grief journey. You also may be affected by the death and have your own grief to deal with. Make sure you have support for yourself. Take time to do some special things you enjoy doing.

Remember:

- People do recover from a tragic loss eventually, but they will be changed forever by it.
- The greatest help for bereaved people is the understanding and support of their family and friends.
- It is easy to make a mistake or say the wrong thing. But it is never too late to say you are sorry.

By reading this brochure, you are already showing that you care and want to do your best to support your family member or friend. Your support **will** make a difference.



The Road Trauma Support Services Victoria is a not-for-profit organization offering support to anyone in Victoria affected by road trauma – bereaved family members, drivers, witnesses, those who assisted at the scene, passengers, pedestrians, people who have been injured, and friends and family of the above.

Counselling and support services are provided free of charge.

Free call: 1300 367 797