



## Providing Companionship for a Bereaved Senior

### The needs of the bereaved

**When providing companionship for a bereaved senior, it has been observed that the most valuable support one can give is emotional support.**

**Emotional support is expressed through the quality of one's presence and a few simple gestures that help the bereaved rekindle their interest in life.**

When speaking about their experience and what was helpful, many of those who have suffered a loss mention the special attention they received, others mention

the opportunity to share emotions, and many talk about the value of exchanging and connecting with others.

These bonds are healing and help to counter feelings of pain and withdrawal. (Fischer, 2003)

In your companionship role, your compassion and your presence are the best way to offer support.

**Little Brothers**



## Key messages on grief

*Grief is both a unique and universal experience that depends on the type of relationship and that varies according to beliefs, cultures, customs.*

*Grief is a form of distress (profound sadness) and a desire to reconstruct one's life.*

*Each person's perception of grief may differ from the image of grief conveyed by society.*

*Grieving persons find solace and support in telling their story.*

Source: Johanne De Montigny. Psychologist in palliative care and bereavement follow-up, McGill University Health Centre, Montreal General Hospital, and in private practice. Little Brothers bereavement training, May 2020.



## Good practices

- Listen, without giving advice;
- Acknowledge the person's suffering, do not hesitate to mention the deceased person's name
- Remain open to the person's emotions: anger, guilt, denial, despair, etc.;
- Accept silences and tears;
- Ask the person what they would like you to do for them;
- Respect their pace while encouraging them to maintain ties and resume their activities;
- Watch for signs of worsening, such as prolonged grief or depression;
- Provide materials on grief;
- Suggest consulting with professionals or a grief support group.



## Attitudes to adopt

- Be aware that another person's grief can revive your own.
- Your caring presence will be especially important during the first year. Everything will be a first for the bereaved person.
- As a volunteer, you are not alone: share your observations and feelings. Your coordinator is there to gather information about the bereaved person and offer you perspective.
- As a caregiver, be sure to stay in touch with a network of trustworthy people as well as specialized support groups and organizations. Talk about what you are experiencing and feeling.
- Make sure you respect the limits of your companionship; it is important to ensure your own well-being while helping someone else through this transition period.



## Things to avoid

- Denying or judging the person's emotions;
- Minimizing their feelings or the magnitude of their loss;
- Suggesting they move on;
- Withdrawing from your commitment or spacing out visits.

## Additional resources

### Telephone

Info-santé/Info social : 811  
Tel-Écoute/Tel-Aînés : 1 888 LE DEUIL  
(1888 533 3845)

### Reading

BEAUTHÉAC Nadine, *100 réponses aux questions sur le deuil et le chagrin*, Albin Michel, 2010.

### Online

Infodeuil, [www.infodeuil.ca](http://www.infodeuil.ca) (in French only)

Fondation Monbourquette, *Les étapes du deuil*, <https://bit.ly/etapes-deuil> (in French only).

De MONTIGNY Johanne, *Transformation de l'être en contexte de deuil et de fin de vie*, <https://bit.ly/transformation-deuil>, UQAM, Département de psychologie (in French only).