

Skillful and Effective Communication Examples for Talking to Patients Who Are Grieving

“I can’t imagine what you’re feeling right now”

“The pain you’re feeling right now is the echo of the love you felt for...”

“It would be weird if you weren’t feeling the way you’re feeling now”

“Any idea that grief proceeds in a step-wise or linear way is total bullshit. Everyone experiences the process in their own way.”

“What wouldn’t you have to care about to not feel what you’re feeling now? If given the choice, would you have it any different way?”

“Give yourself the kindness to feel whatever you’re feeling in this moment.”

“What would you tell a close friend if they were going through what you’re going through now? Can you offer even a small part of that to yourself?”

“Some days are going to feel like you’re getting better, then you may feel guilty for feeling better. This is all part of it, again just feel what you feel.”

“Most people are terrible about expressing condolences and may say things like, ‘I know what you’re going through’ or ‘I felt the same way when...,’ try to attend to their intentions, not their words”

“Access your support network when it feels helpful, and take time for yourself if helpful – though be mindful of isolating”

“I’m here with you”

“I see the pain you’re in”

“Pain is the natural response to what you’ve been through, suffering comes from how we respond to pain”

Inquire about religious/spiritual/cultural traditions or practices that the patient can apply, even if no longer active. Familiar rituals can provide a sense of direction and stability when everything feels overwhelming.

Provider displays of emotion are completely normal. Without taking the focus off of your patient, put words to what is happening without trying to mask your feelings. “I’m noticing that I’m very moved by what you’re sharing.”