



HOT TIP
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Northern Health Palliative Care

Providing Psychosocial Care – Tips for Personal Support Workers

Holistic care sees the person beyond their physical illnesses and emotional responses to death, dying, loss, and grief. Personal support workers play an essential role in psychosocial care by “*being with and responding*” to those they care for in ways that create a nurturing, safe place in which both the person and their family may grow, even as the person is dying (Murray, 2014, p119).

Understanding the basic truths about loss and grief:

- ❖ Loss is natural. Everyone experiences loss as part of being alive.
- ❖ People whose health is declining and who are dying experience multiple losses.
- ❖ Grief is a natural, healthy response to loss that helps people adapt to living in a changed world.
- ❖ People grieve in unique ways that change over time.
- ❖ Denial can be an effective way to cope with overwhelming loss & grief.
- ❖ Hope is a wish for something that is important to the person.
- ❖ Grief is a whole person experience.

Strategies which personal support workers may use:

- 1) Acknowledging loss**
 - Acknowledge the person’s loss and grief
 - There is no right or wrong way to grieve.
- 2) Empathizing and reflecting**
 - Acknowledge how the person is feeling.
 - Reflect what the person has said.
- 3) Leaving room for silence**
 - Allow the person the time and space to reflect on their thoughts.
 - Stay present; offer a gentle touch or companionship in silence.
- 4) Individualizing care**
 - Grief is a unique experience.
 - Be curious; invite the person to describe what help they would like and appreciate it.
- 5) Making room for tears**
 - Crying is a normal, healthy response.
 - Silence and gently acknowledging, “*it’s so hard right now*” may make space for tears.
- 6) Identifying people who may need extra support from bereavement care**
 - Circumstances of death – e.g. sudden death.
 - Personal factors – e.g. social isolation.
 - Social factors – e.g. financial difficulties.
 - Normal signs of grief seem exaggerated and/or occur over an extended time.
 - Person is not coping well, showing consistent and debilitating fatigue or an inability to take care of daily business, talk about self-harm, or express a sense of lacking purpose in life.
 - Record & report this information to the nurse.
- 7) Remembering the whole picture**
 - Emotional pain cannot be fixed with “*emotional morphine.*”
 - It is not your job to fix deep suffering; but rather, it is your job to provide support.

Reference: Murray, K (2014). Providing Psychosocial Care. Integrating a Palliative Approach: Essentials for Personal Support Workers (pp.119-149).