

# HOW TO FIND A GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP



Especially in the early days and weeks after a loved one's death, family and friends can be of immeasurable help in getting through the process of early grief. For many individual reasons though, some choose to access a support group as they make their way through grief.

Some bereaved people are worried about further burdening family members with their pain while others simply want to identify an additional group of friends who understand the unique experiences of bereavement. We all need the support of other concerned people in grief, and a bereavement support group can provide an important part of that support system.

## AS YOU SEEK THE SUPPORT OF A BEREAVEMENT GROUP, CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS. . .

**What kinds of loss are represented in the group?** Some groups are designed for widows or widowers while others specifically address the needs of bereaved parents. Other groups are more general in scope, and therefore, include people with a diversity of losses. When inquiring about a group, ask what kinds of losses the people currently in the group have faced and how you might "fit in."



**What is the time commitment?** Groups can meet for a pre-determined number of sessions (six-weeks or eight weeks, for example) or they might be open-ended. Some first-time group participants are more comfortable with a time-limited group, knowing the group will end in a few weeks. Open-ended groups, however, often have people at all different points in their grief journey which might facilitate you learning from those a little further along.

**Who leads the group?** Groups can be led by a trained counselor, a caring lay person or a combination. Lay-led groups can be helpful because these people likely have faced their own significant losses. Many lay-led groups are supported by a trained counselor, even if he or she is not present at the group meetings. Lay group leaders are most effective when an experienced professional is at least "in the wings" to provide support when needed.

**How does the group operate?** Group meetings might consist of discussion among members, viewing a video together, or be conducted more like a class with a principal "teacher." Ask the leader or sponsor to tell you how the group operates and try one that seems most comfortable for you.



While you will be encouraged to tell your story, most bereavement groups will welcome you to come and simply listen to the others, especially at first. Group members and leaders understand your pain since they are either walking through grief or have done so recently.

As you seek a bereavement support group, you can ask your funeral director for recommendations of groups in the community. Many hospices, hospitals and faith communities have bereavement support groups, and some therapists have bereavement support groups as part of their practice. If you have children or teens, you might want to inquire about groups for young people, too.



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