

It can be helpful to remember that while we all experience grief differently, we all share one thing in common—we can't get through it alone.

In the early stages of grief, you are often just figuring out how to put one foot in front of the other and may not even know what you need or how to ask for it.

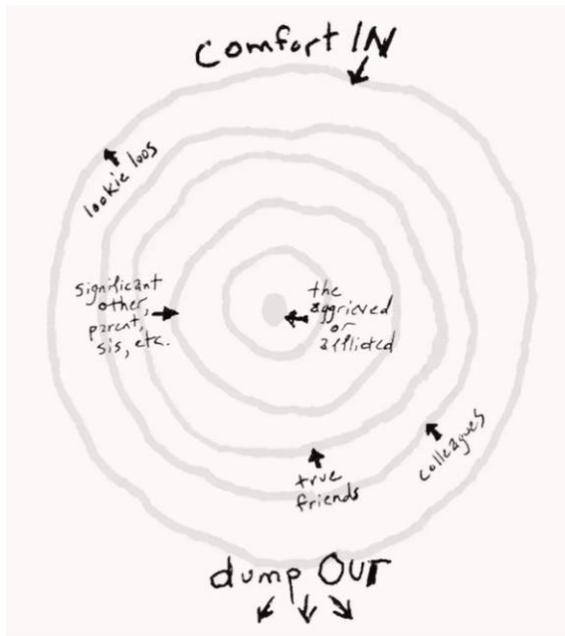
Just as there are hundreds of ways to feel about loss, there are as many ways you might need or receive support.

It can sometimes feel difficult to ask for support. Maybe you are worried about making someone feel burdened or uncomfortable, or perhaps you're not sure how they will react. However, in most cases, the people around you want to help you but aren't sure how and also worried about burdening you too.

It's also true that some people around you might not show up for you in ways you expected. That's okay. Part of asking for support is setting limits and boundaries that feel necessary for you.

Setting a boundary doesn't mean shutting someone out, but it may mean shifting some of your interactions. The Ring Theory of Support is a useful way to think about who the appropriate person for different kinds of support might be, by following a "Comfort In, Dump Stress Out" model.

The theory was developed by Susan Silk and Barry Goldman as Susan coped with a cancer diagnosis, to keep the experiencing difficulty the center of focus.



Sometimes the simplest things are the hardest to ask for. Often, you might just want someone to listen, and it's okay to ask for that. You might also want to talk about your deceased loved one, but those around you might be nervous to mention them.

Remember that family and friends want to show you care but may be unsure how to do so.

Here are some phrases you can use:

- “It’s been hard to keep track of all the details. Would you be able to come to this appointment/call/etc. with me and help me keep notes?”
- “I’m feeling lonely, but I don’t have energy to do anything. Can you come over and watch TV with me? Please don’t be offended if I don’t want to talk.”
- “I don’t want to only be thinking about [loved one’s last days]. Can you tell me some of your favorite memories of them?”
- “I know you want to do something to help me, but the most important thing I need right now is to have someone listen. Would it be okay if you just listened on this call?”
- “I keep thinking about my loved one, and it’s been so overwhelming. I’d like to do something to take my mind off this. Do you think you can plan an activity for us?”
- “I haven’t felt like myself and I don’t want my kids to see me this way. Would you be able to look after them for a few hours?”
- “My [aunt] keeps talking to me about what she would have done differently if she was caring for [my loved one]. It’s really not helpful for me to hear this right now. Are you able to tell her to talk to you or someone else about it instead?”
- “It’s been hard for me to remember what to do for some errands. The next time you go to the grocery store can you pick up [xyz] for me?”
- “My friend wants to throw a celebration of life party but I just don’t feel comfortable doing that yet. I am grateful for the gesture and I don’t want them to feel let down or that I don’t appreciate them. Can you help me talk to them?”

### **Thinking Ahead**

Anniversaries, holidays, and birthdays can also be highly emotional times where grief can feel more pronounced. Often, it’s the days and weeks leading up to these occasions that are the hardest. It might be helpful to make plans with loved ones now so you can feel prepared for these more challenging times.

- “I know Thanksgiving isn’t going to feel the same this year. Would you mind just checking in on me that day?”
- “We usually visited the beach for [loved one’s birthday]. Can you come with me this year?”
- “If I seem a little more irritable, or sad, or forgetful please be patient with me. It’s [loved one’s] anniversary and I’m a bit overwhelmed.