

Supporting a Motherless Daughter



Grieving the loss of a mother can be relentless and consuming. If you are friends with someone or know of someone who has lost their mother, it can be difficult to know what to say or do.

We asked women within our community about what they found to be most helpful in terms of support and what they needed, and continue to need, while grieving their mother. Here's what they suggested...

Be prepared to listen – no need to try and 'fix'

One of the greatest gifts you can give someone grieving their mother, is to just sit, be with them and listen. Be patient and prepared to listen – even about the same things over and over. Be in the moment without feeling the pressure of needing to fix. Avoid making comments such as: "you'll get over it" or "I know how you feel." It is okay to say "I am so sorry and I don't know what to say, but I am here to listen."

Share memories and stories

Most people are glad to hear of ways that their mother has been remembered and valued by other people. Motherless daughters want to hear stories and memories about their mother, so if you do have some, don't be afraid to share, if appropriate. Sometimes a memory or chat can make them laugh or happy, but can also cause sadness at the same time. If someone becomes upset when talking about their mother or recalling memories together, don't feel you need to shut the conversation down. Ask them if they want to keep talking or acknowledge that good memories can also bring sadness and let them keep talking if they want to.

Don't assume that the person grieving is over their loss just because they appear to be having a good day

Two or more strong emotions can be felt at the same time – they can be carried together. Women grieving their mother will have times where they experience immense grief and sadness and other times where they will be able to experience joy and happiness. The good days will become more frequent, but it is important not to rush someone grieving their mother or presume they're ok. They still need your support and understanding when they have their bad days.

Milestones and different times of the year cause heightened emotions

Be mindful that annual celebration days such as Mother's Day, birthdays and Christmas, etc, as well as anniversaries are often sad occasions now for a grieving daughter – they'll need some extra love, care and understanding from you during these times, even if their mother died many years ago. Not only are the days themselves difficult, but the lead up can cause immense anxiety and sadness too. Milestones are also very bittersweet for a motherless daughter as these times cannot be shared with their mother, so whilst feeling happiness, there is also a lot of heartache too.

Don't be afraid to mention their mother's name

This is an opportunity for you to show your friend or relative that their mother's memory lives on and that they are remembered and acknowledged. Ask the person to tell you about their mother and actively listen.

Keep in touch

Make sure your friend or relative knows you have not forgotten about their mother, or about them. Be prepared to reach out to them and be supportive on an ongoing basis. Even something as simple as a 'how are you' text message can make a difference.

Selfcare

Listening and sharing someone's pain, can be personally demanding and exhausting. Make sure you have supports for yourself and be aware that your own experiences of loss (if any) may also be triggered.

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Quite often we unknowingly make mistakes in trying to show and express how we care and support someone who is grieving. Although many responses to someone's grief is meant with the best intention, they can often come across the wrong way to the griever.

Our community of women suggested the following tips as to what's helpful and what's unhelpful.

HELPFUL

- Take food – food is love
- It is ok not to know what to say – sometimes just sitting in silence and/or just listening is the perfect way to support
- Listen without directing away from the grief
- Let them know that it is ok to cry, or not cry
- Let them know that they can count on you long after the funeral
- Just being present without the pressure of trying to fix the situation – after all, this is something that cannot be fixed
- Never underestimate the power of a hug
- A gift of a candle is much more useful than flowers
- Ask them to tell you all about their mum – the good and the bad
- A quick text to let them know you're thinking of them or ask if they would like to meet for a coffee
- Always say their mothers name – you will not upset them by doing this
- Let them know that they will never get over their loss, but that they will learn to build a world around their loss
- Let them know that you will be there and to call anytime for help or support – but, only if this is something you can commit to. Let them know what you can commit to.

UNHELPFUL

Avoid making the following comments and comparisons:

- She's in a better place
- You need to get over it
- You'll get over it eventually
- Your mum would want you to be happy
- At least she didn't suffer, she is in a better place now and at peace
- At least she is not suffering anymore
- God has a plan
- You were lucky to have her for as long as you did
- Everything happens for a reason
- This will make you stronger
- Time heals all wounds
- I know how you feel because my dog/cat/bird died
- Be strong
- She lived a good life

Please note this is a general fact sheet about supporting girls and women who have lost their mother. It is not age specific, although some content may be useful across different age brackets.