

SUPPORTING A MATE & A COLLEAGUE



Feeling alone and isolated is a natural response for a grieving parent and as a result many bereaved dads search for support online, only to not know what it is they are needing – this is a reality of grief. In general, many men do not feel they have permission to tell their story or share how they are feeling out of fear of being perceived as weak within societal expectations or not being able to cope and this makes finding both formal and informal support even more difficult.

Many men observe from society that they should not show “weakness” and that they have to “be strong”, which leads to a natural response of hiding intense emotions and unfamiliar thoughts, deepened further when people in society feel uncomfortable with a grieving parent’s pain. It is common for a bereaved dad to want to take on the role of protector in order to manage his own grief, to take on the role of supporting his wife and keeping everything operating in the household. We call this Instrumental Grief.

Speaking with many dads we know it is important for them to share their story – not just from the perspective of their partner but from their own, which includes being free to share emotions while telling their story.

The following are a few ways to provide support to the Grieving Dad you may know:

1. Encourage them to talk about what they are feeling and thinking – you may visit them in their home or somewhere else.
2. See if they would like to go for a walk, kick a footy, do something that gives them some space to be free to think.
3. Remind them that while you might not know their experience, they are not alone to share at anytime (this might involve checking in on them a few times, even when they say they are Ok).
4. Let them speak openly about their pain (don’t try and solve their problems) – just listen.
5. Allow them the time to process what has happened to them – don’t think a week or two is enough.
6. Ask them about their child and their hopes they had.
7. Offer assistance that might make their daily routine easier – don’t wait for them to suggest, ask what you can do.
8. Let them know it’s okay to not be okay – this is a huge trauma they are experiencing. Grief is uncomfortable and being sad at the death of a baby is not a problem that needs to be fixed.

Most important to remember is that you may need to think before you speak. Understand how your words may be interpreted, stay away from the cliché comments and if you really don’t know what to say, say nothing. There is healing in silence so it is better to sit quietly and listen than to fill the air with words that are not helpful.

RESOURCES:

Books

Swallowed by a Snake – Thomas Golden

Into the Cave: When Men Grieve

A Bereaved Father – Steve Younis

Grieving Dads – Kelly Farley

Coping with Grief – Mal McKissock

Podcasts

Grieving Dads – S1E3 – Dudes And Dads Podcast

Dad Still Standing on Apple Podcasts

Grief and Men | The New Compassionate Male Podcast (mensfellowship.net)

Conversations in Grief | Podcast on Spotify