

Talking to Members about Death and Loss

INITIATING THE CONVERSATION

Members may feel uncomfortable having conversations about death and asking questions. As Club staff, having positive supportive relationships with members can help them feel supported and allow them to safely express their fears and ask questions. Not encouraging members to express themselves may lead them to think that no one cares about them. Speaking up lets them know that you acknowledge their grief and you want to provide support to them however you can. Here are some general steps and approaches that you can take to begin the conversation with a member who has experienced loss:

- ❑ **Express your concern:** Acknowledge the loss and let the member know you can offer support.
- ❑ **Be genuine:** Be authentic and honest about your feelings.
- ❑ **Invite the conversation:** Use simple open-ended questions like "How are you doing?"
- ❑ **Listen and observe:** Listen and observe reactions in a non-judgmental manner.
- ❑ **Limit personal sharing:** Limit your personal experiences and focus on the member.
- ❑ **Offer practical advice:** Focus on giving advice that feels appropriate to the situation.
- ❑ **Offer reassurance:** Let members know you will be there to help them cope.
- ❑ **Continue contact:** Continue to monitor how the member is coping.

WAYS TO RESPOND

Many well-meaning statements may not be as helpful to grieving members. Below are commonly used expressions of support and alternative statements that may be more supportive.

Instead of Saying This	Say This Instead
"I know just what you are going through." (Everyone's grief experience is unique)	"Can you tell me more about what it's been like for you?"
"I know this is hard, but it's important to remember the good things in life too." (It's okay for them to express however they are feeling)	"What kinds of memories do you have about the person who you lost?"
"I lost [someone] too when I was your age." (Focus on the person's experience)	"Tell me more what this has been like for you."
"You'll need to be strong for your family." (Everyone should be able to grieve)	"How is your family doing? What concerns do you have about them?"
"My dog died last week, I know how you feel." (Focus on the person's loss by not comparing)	"I know how I've felt losing someone I love, but don't know how you are feeling. Do you want to share?"
"At least they are no longer in pain." (Focus on not minimizing the experience)	"What have you been thinking about since you lost your loved one?"