



Visiting Nurse Service Of New York®

HOSPICE CARE

We Bring The Caring Home®

SCRIPT FOR TELEPHONE CONVERSATION WITH THE BEREAVED

Bereavement volunteers are experienced hospice volunteers who have taken additional training to make initial bereavement phone calls to hospice survivor family members who have been assessed by the IDT team to be “low risk” for complications in bereavement.

Here are some possible scripts to follow in making these calls:

1. Hello, Mr./Mrs. _____. My name is _____ and I’m from the Visiting Nurse Service of New York Hospice Care Bereavement Team.
2. Do you have a few minutes to speak?
3. First of all, I would like to extend my condolences and that of our Hospice team to you on the death of your _____. (pause)
4. I am a volunteer with the bereavement program. Bereavement volunteers are people who have received special training in helping people deal with their grief, and we regularly make phone calls to family member of persons who have died on the hospice program to see how they are doing. If it is all right with you, I would like to ask you a few questions...I don’t know all the particulars of _____’s death
5. Could you tell me about those days? What was the funeral like?
6. Have you been able to resume a schedule for yourself during these past few weeks/months?
7. Have you been feeling well physically? Have you been able to rest and sleep?

8. Are you eating as is normal for you?
9. What kind of person was _____?
10. You know, it is very normal for people who are grieving to experience a lot of emotional and physical changes when they are grieving. It takes a lot of patience with your self just to be able to adapt to all the changes in your life. Have you noticed any changes in your appetite or your sleeping patterns? What about your overall health? Have you been to the doctor for a physical?
11. What kind of support do you have from your friends or family?
12. Are there any strong feelings that have been difficult or persistent?
(*Work with what they say in response to this question.*)
13. You'll be receiving a *Family Evaluation of Hospice Care* form in the mail soon. We hope you take the time to complete it, as it is very helpful for us to know how we did and how we can improve our care for patients and families.
14. We want you to know about some of our bereavement services:

Mention the **groups** and **individual grief counseling** that is available as well as the **Pelkey education talks**. The education talks are often a way to engage people who are unsure about attendance at a group. There is also an annual **memorial service**. Bereavement counselors can also mail **educational material** about the grief process. They will also be receiving a-monthly **Bereavement Newsletter** every other month from VNS Hospice Care.

Mention that they can call the bereavement counselor in their borough region (see the list of bereavement staff and phone numbers).

Thank you for your time today/tonight.

Would it be all right with you if either I or someone else from the bereavement department would call you again in a month or so?

Thank you, again, and please know that you are in our thoughts.

Other Leading Questions or Comments *(for most any calls, not just the initial call):*

- A. Some days can be harder than others. What have you found?
- B. We find that even within families, different people grieve differently.
- C. Often times the days leading up to significant dates can be trying and actually harder than the day itself.
- D. What time of day or day of the week is hardest for you?
- E. Are you a member of a faith congregation and have you gone since the death? How was that for you? *(This is often either a very difficult or a very comforting experience)*
- F. What is hardest for you?
- G. How are you sleeping?
- H. How is your appetite?
- I. How are the other family members coping? Is there anyone you are particularly concerned about?
- J. Are family 'pushing you' to do things you don't feel ready for? How are you handling this?
- K. Use paraphrases to reflect what they have said: Sounds like....(i.e. things seem overwhelming for you now)
- L. Use 'tell me more about that...'

Complicated grief-indicators:

Bereavement volunteers are requested to be attentive to any of the following indicators of complicated bereavement.

1. Does the person seem always irritable, annoyed, intolerant or angry?

2. Does the person seem to experience an ongoing sense of numbness or isolation?
3. Does the person seem to feel that they have no one to talk to about what's happened?
4. Does the person highly anxious most of the time (in "high gear"), either about their own eventual death or the death of someone they love?
5. Does such behavior interfere with their relationships or ability to concentrate or day-to-day functioning? Are they afraid of becoming close to new people for fear of experiencing another loss?
6. Does the person seem to be acting in ways that might prove harmful over time: drinking more than usual; using more prescription or non-prescription drugs; engaging in sexual activities that are unsafe or unwise; driving in an unsafe or reckless manner; entertaining serious thoughts about suicide?

If one or more of these six indicators emerge as significant issues in the conversation, please follow through in one or more of the following ways:

- 1. Call your Volunteer Manager to discuss the situation.**
- 2. Call the Bereavement Counselor for the borough to discuss what you heard.**
- 3. Tell the person:** *“Given what you’ve been telling me, I am going to ask one of the professional staff to call you also so they can check in with you as well. It sounds like the last days/weeks have been really hard on you.”*

Developed by:
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