Assisting someone who has lost a loved one to suicide can feel difficult, but there are ways you can help.

**Demonstrate empathy:** Suicide loss survivors may experience emotions that make you feel uncomfortable or uneasy. Be attentive and listen to what they say without trying to change the subject or offer advice. Especially don’t ask about how their loved one died.

**Accept how they are feeling:** Those who have lost a loved one to suicide deal with complex feelings such as: fear, grief, shame, anger and more. It is important to accept how they are feeling and show compassion and support towards that individual. Try to accept how they are feeling without judgement.

**Continue to use the loved one's name:** It is important to use the name of the person who died by suicide, especially when talking to survivors. In doing so, you demonstrate the importance of the individual who died by suicide. It may be easier to discuss the topic when using their name as well. This also allows the individual to share stories about their loved one without feeling any judgement. It allows you and survivors to acknowledge the person that has passed.

**Recognize their emotions:** Suicide loss survivors should be able to express their feelings and share their thoughts in their own way. It is important that you don’t try to “fix” the problem, but rather listen and support what they are experiencing. Do not try to share your own experiences of loss in hopes of connecting with them; rather, understand that their experience is unique. Allow them to speak freely by listening and focusing on being a support system for them. Let them know you are here for them and care about them.

**Be sensitive to dates:** Certain holidays and anniversaries may resurface feelings for an individual who has lost a loved one to suicide. These dates may place emphasis on their absence. It is important to be mindful in these circumstances. You could ask the individual what would be helpful for them during this time. They may appreciate a home-cooked meal or flowers. This lets the individual know that you are thinking of them.

It is important to be mindful of the language we are using when we are trying to support a survivor. Think of how we can shift the conversation to focus on them instead of ourselves.

Here are a few examples of how you can change the conversation:
- **Shift response - turning the conversation to yourself**
  - Mary: I’ve been so busy lately
  - Tim: Me too, I’m so overwhelmed
- **Additional example:**
  - Mary: I’ve been feeling really down lately
• Tim: I’ve been feeling down too, I have a lot going on.

We can see this takes the focus away from the survivor we are trying to help, and makes it about us. Instead of using shift responses we should be using supportive responses.

• Supportive response - keeping the conversation on the survivor
  • Mary: I’ve been so busy lately
  • Tim: What have you been busy with?
• Additional example:
  • Mary: I’ve been feeling really down lately
  • Tim: Can you tell me more about why you have been feeling this way?

These supportive responses encourage the survivor to continue sharing their feelings. Be aware of your responses and aim to keep the focus on the individual. Ask questions rather than sharing your own personal stories or experiences. By listening more and talking less, you can support a survivor who is in need.