

DNA Guidance: Responding to Distress Around Death and Dying

Why this matters:

Older adults, carers and companions may experience sadness, grief, or anxiety when death and dying are mentioned or when reminders arise (e.g., through conversation, music, memory sharing, or peers' ill health). It is natural and should be met with compassion.

If someone becomes upset in a session:

1. **Acknowledge gently**
 - Pause and offer calm reassurance.
 - Use simple phrases: *"I can see this has brought up some strong feelings — that's okay."*
2. **Give them space**
 - Allow them to take time out if they wish (e.g., sit quietly, step outside with a staff member).
 - Never force them to continue with the activity.
3. **Offer support**
 - Ask: *"Would you like to talk about it, or would you prefer a quiet moment?"*
 - Respect their choice.
4. **Normalise emotions**
 - Remind them it's natural to feel sadness around loss and that others may share similar experiences.
5. **Safeguard dignity**
 - Avoid drawing too much group attention. Support discreetly where possible.
6. **Follow-up after the session**
 - Check in with the person and/or their carer before they leave.
 - Offer signposting to further support if appropriate (carer groups, dementia support, GP, counselling).
 - We also have a Self-Compassionate video series which (you) people can use at home which has breathing and movement techniques. Please share DNA's Video Library with them to find this information.
<https://vimeo.com/user/45203851/folder/25315902>

Artist and Staff Self-Compassion:

- Supporting grief can be emotionally demanding. Take time to debrief with colleagues if you need.
- Share concerns with the CEO or Executive Assistant if you feel follow-up is needed.