



## ***Helpful Hints For Family / Friends***

It is very common that friends and family want to offer as much help and support as they can, but they struggle with what to do, what to say, and how to help!

- BE A FRIEND – parents will need some direction.
- BE CONSISTENT – If you offer to do something....FOLLOW THROUGH.
- BE PRESENT – Being present in the moment of their need.
- BE SENSITIVE – Keep your faith, beliefs, and clichés to yourself.
- Offer to help notify family, friends, co-workers, and groups to which the parent or child might belong or attend.
- Be the telephone operator: answer calls, place calls, or screen calls: Allow the family to decide whom they wish to speak to.
- Say a heartfelt “I am sorry” and “I am here if you need anything” and really mean it. If you say you are praying for them, Pray! Don’t overextend a promise you can’t deliver. If you agree to talk to them at 2am, answer the phone at 2am.
- Run errands, make a list of items to discuss with the family when appropriate, go to the grocery store, pharmacy, cleaners, gas station, or do laundry.
- Offer to cancel appointments, classes etc.
- Be a good listener. Don’t be afraid to say their child’s name. Let the family talk about their child. Let them show you pictures.
- Provide complete meals in disposable containers along with paper napkins, disposable utensils. Leave written instructions on how to prepare the food.

- Offer to help care for surviving children
- Support the family in its own way of grieving. Support parents in their decisions. Now is not a time to throw in opinions.
- Do not rush parents in deciding what to do with their child's items or room.
- Do not seek out things to say to try and make the family feel better or expect them to be happier or thankful for what they still have. The family is aware of their blessings, but those factors are not central to their concerns right now. Comments of this sort only hurt and tend to discount the loss.
- Keep your beliefs to yourself. It is good if those beliefs help you, use them for your own comfort, but do not expect the family to appreciate or find solace in them.
- Avoid trivial conversations; the weather, work, and gossip are of little interest to a bereaved family. Remember that silence and mere presence can be helpful.
- Offer to accompany them to appointments and offer to drive.
- Offer to notify service providers to whom the family may have frequent contact: dentist, doctor, pharmacy, favorite restaurant, etc.
- Offer to notify others involved with activities of siblings: school, sports, extracurricular.
- Offer to pick up their house
- Offer to mow their lawn
- If you have a child (same age), ask the family if it is ok if the child be present. Do not automatically assume that the presence of your child "may hurt too much", or that "they have to face it someday so the sooner the better." Respect where they are at emotionally.
- Maintain contact with the bereaved family, even if they do not seem to be receptive to calls or visits. Don't feel rejected if initial offers of help are not accepted.
- Offer gift cards
- Remember that the pain and hurt are present months and years later. Expect them to have bad days, crying spells, and anger. Don't ask: "Are you ok?" Are you doing better? These statements imply that you feel that they

should be better. Try phrases like: “I know you are not ok, is there anything I can help you with for where you are right now?”

- The first year is hard. Reach out often!!! Use phrases like: “I don’t know exactly what to say but I want to do whatever you need me to do.” “I can’t understand what you are going through but I want you to know I will never forget (insert child’s name) Every family loves to hear the name of their child.
- Don’t be offended if the bereaved decline invites for gatherings, events, social outings or other engagements.
- Expect emotional lash outs or ups and downs. If you are someone, who is close to the bereaved, you may be the one that the family feels comfortable unleashing their emotions on. Try to remain calm and avoid confrontation.
- Don’t ever compare the loss of a child to the loss of a parent, sibling, grandparent, pet, or family member. Child loss is a unique loss. It is not the normal progression of life for any parent to bury their child.
- Don’t be sensitive or offended if plans are canceled at the last minute. Emotions sway with the wind and what felt possible 30 minutes ago may become too overwhelming.
- Acknowledge anniversary dates, such as birthdays, the date of the death, and, for the first year, the monthly death date, special dates that mean something to the family, trauma trigger dates.
- Acknowledge other “first” days as they occur, such as the time at which the child would have entered kindergarten, first grade, junior high, high school and the year the child would be graduating. First holidays without their child are especially difficult. Try to offer support during these heavy trigger dates and holidays.
- Be aware of places where you might see children when planning outings with the bereaved family. Certain events can be painful and a harsh reminder of the child that has passed.
- Visit the cemetery and offer to accompany the family to visit. Bring flowers to the family.
- If you make a mistake don’t be afraid to go back and say you are sorry.
- Avoid statements such as: “you appear so strong” or “I don’t know how you are doing it” or “I don’t think I could go through that.” To a bereaved parent,

those statements sound patronizing. No one wants to be that strong and you don't know how strong you are until you are forced to be.

- Refer to their child in present tense. Ex: She is so beautiful. She is such a special girl. I know she is so proud of you. Every bereaved parent longs to keep the connection with their child alive and this simple act helps facilitate that.
- Remember that no two people respond to grief the same way. If they aren't hurting themselves or physically harming someone else, chances are they are doing it right.
- Sometimes silence is best, just being a shoulder for them to cry on is exactly what they need. When you don't know what to say, be honest and say, "I don't know what to say, but I am here...I will continue to show up for you"
- Give them permission to feel what they need to feel.
- Be kind and gentle with yourself.
- You may not receive a thank you but know that you are appreciated.