

It may be difficult for you to understand the intensity of a bereaved parent's grief. You may feel awkward and uneasy with the parents, or concerned about what to say and how to say it. Some people think there is nothing they can do to help. Here are some ways you can show how much you care.

Make yourself available to the grieving parents and family.

Maintain frequent and regular contact with the family. Although they may not tell you in words, knowing that you are there for them and that you are willing to help means a great deal. Do not wait for them to call and ask you for your help. You might offer to:

- Run errands
- Prepare food
- Help with housekeeping or yard work
- Care for pets
- House-sit during the funeral
- Take care of other children

Allow the parents and family to grieve at their own pace.

We all take different lengths of time to accept loss as each one of us reacts differently to grief. Encourage the family to be patient. They should not try to do too much or expect too much of themselves during this time. Unfortunately, families often suffer alone. Although we expect there to be some stage of normal grief, most friends and family are eager to return to being themselves, perhaps dismissing the depth of their pain. This can leave the family feeling misunderstood and driven to isolation. Your caring attention as well as the passage of time will have significant effects on the family.

Be a good listener.

Let parents and family members talk. Accept that there is nothing you can say that will make it all right. Avoid telling stories about your own losses or telling parents how they should feel. Their grief over the loss of their child is individual. One of the most important things that you can do is listen, allowing periods of silence rather than filling the empty space with conversation.

Keep in mind that their loss does not end with the funeral.

Some people think that grieving for a child may only last a few months, but parents will miss their child for the rest of their lives. Call or send the family a card on the child's birthday or on Thanksgiving, Christmas, or any other holiday the family celebrates. The first few years will be the hardest. Remembering happy times or sharing stories about the child will let them know you have special memories and their child will not be forgotten.

Be willing to accept changes.

Families may make changes in their lives as they learn to live without their child. They may change the way they relate to friends and family as well. Have patience. Maintain contact with the family as their grief will continue after their initial shock and disbelief. Call, listen, and visit as appropriate for you and the family. At first, the family may want to avoid social activities. Gently encourage them to go out for a walk, see a movie or go out for lunch. If they decline, be understanding of their feelings and in time, ask them again.

Helpful things to say:

- I am so sorry.
- I don't know what to say.
- I am here if you want to talk about it.
- I am remembering your child today.
- I am here for you.
- Speak the child's name.
- I love you.
- Go ahead and cry. It's OK. I'm here.

Hurtful things to say:

- It is for the best.
- At least you still have your other children.
- It was God's will.
- Are you going to have another baby?
- I know how you feel.
- You have an angel now.
- Your child is in a better place now.
- Time will heal.