

# Do's & Don'ts of Grief Support

Please share these do's and don'ts of grief support with your friends and family.

**Don't** offer platitudes or try to fix what has happened. Don't suggest, "you have other healthy children", "you can have more", or "God needed an angel." There is nothing positive in our child's death. We are longing for our child and nothing could replace them or truly ease our pain right now.

**Don't** assume the age of our child that died determines how much we love them and miss them. With our child's death also died, our dreams for their future and plans we had with them as a living part of our family.

**Don't** think that our child's death means there should be no laughter or smiles in our presence.

**Don't** leave it up to us to ask for help during this time. Right now, everything seems so overwhelming that we can't begin to know what we need help with. Don't call and say, "Let me know if you need anything".

**Don't** assume that losing our child will strengthen our relationship as a couple. Often times, the differences in the way men and women grieve, put strain on relationships and add to the grief that each person is going through.

**Don't** ignore our loss or avoid us after our child's death. It's very hurtful when people "cross the street" when they see us coming to avoid facing us. Most bereaved parents long to talk about their child.

**Do** try to just listen and allow us to cry. Give us space and time to shed tears and talk about our child and what has happened as much as we need to. Don't try to offer answers. It's unlikely any will satisfy us. We need to retell our story; express our fears, questions, doubts, and sadness. We just need to feel like we're heard.

**Do** share with us ways our child may have impacted your life in the time they were here. Reassure us that our child mattered and that our feelings and reactions surrounding their death are understandable. This is the biggest loss we'll ever experience no matter how long our child was on this earth.

**Do** share your favorite memories and funny stories about our child with us. Remembering all of the happy times we had with them may be just what we need. Laughter is very healing and sometimes humor is one of the best coping techniques.

**Do** offer practical and specific support. "I'll pick up the kids from school, do homework, feed them dinner, and then bring them home at 7" or "I'll take the kids shopping and buy them outfits for the funeral" are both the type of suggestions that are helpful.

**Do** treat us as individuals and understand we will deal with our child's death in two different ways. Don't assume that Mom is hurting any more than Dad is at this time. Fathers can sometimes be neglected because sometimes they're not as open and willing to talk. Offer support to both parents equally.

**Do** talk to us about our child and what happened. Just saying you are sorry means so much. Our life has changed dramatically; we need the people that took interest in our lives before the tragedy more than ever.

# Do's & Don't of Grief Support (cont'd)

Please share these do's and don'ts of grief support with your friends and family.

**Don't** be judgmental of our actions, attitude, or behavior during this time. Please be understanding if our children are disruptive or act out. Our world has been turned upside down and we will need patience and love from our family and friends until we get our bearings back.

**Don't** assume we are feeling "all better" and don't need your help anymore when we get back to some of our normal family routines. We may seem to be coping well by all outward appearances, but falling apart on the inside.

**Don't** grow distant and claim to be too busy to stay in touch. It's hurtful to hear excuses about not calling or visiting as often after our child dies. Grief can be very isolating so it will take effort from both sides to maintain our outside relationships.

**Don't** expect us to ever get over our child's death. While we will find a new normal way of life without our child, it will never return to the life we had before. Don't assume at some point that "It's been long enough" or that we should be over the tragedy. Never put a time limit on our sadness.

**Do** try to make allowances for all of us right now. We are dealing with emotions we've never experienced before and we may say or do things that we normally wouldn't do. Please do your best to help us navigate through this difficult time. Seek out advice and offer any helpful suggestions you may find.

**Do** remember that we have no choice but to keep our family going. Looks can be deceiving so we need you to "scratch the surface" and continue to offer help and comfort for years to come.

**Do** keep in touch by phoning, email, and visits. Make yourself available for us to talk. As the weeks turn into months and years... we will still need to talk about our loss. Just be honest and tell us if you don't know what to say. More often than not, we just need someone to listen.

**Do** make us comfortable about sharing our feelings. Help us find ways to include our child's memory during holidays and special occasions. Remember their birthday every year and the anniversary of their death too. A gesture such as mentioning them in a Christmas card can make us smile during a holiday season that is otherwise excruciating for us without our child.