

How you can help bereaved parents



- things we'd like you to know

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www.careforthefamily.org.uk

Do	Don't
Do talk to us – even if you don't know what to say. Knowing that you are sorry about our loss is a good start.	Don't avoid us – it hurts so much when you cross the road when you see us coming, rather than be willing to face us.
Do keep in touch; keep phoning, especially as weeks turn into months and years. Be available.	Don't phone and then say "let me know if I can help".
Do talk about our children – we love to hear your memories of them.	Don't worry about feeling 'awkward' – be normal, yourself, our friend – we are still the same people.
Do think carefully before you speak – we're feeling quite vulnerable at the moment and insensitivity could pull us down very low.	Don't come out with platitudes, trite answers about it "being for the best" or "seeing each other again one day". We long to see them now.
Do listen – it can be more important than what you say. Sometimes we just need to know that we are heard.	Don't say things like – "You can always have another, you're young." Children are not replaceable.
Do give practical support. We're not able to cope with routines at the moment so providing meals, help at home and with our children, is vital.	Don't wait to be asked to help – initially there is so much help we need with just about everything.
Do offer specific help – <i>"I'll pick the children up on Friday, take them out, give them tea and bring them back at 6."</i>	Don't overload us with responsibilities – for a while it will be all we can cope with to get out of bed and get dressed.
Do talk about everyday things that matter as well – we're still interested in you and what is going on around us, but 'small talk' can seem very trivial.	If you have a faith, don't be super-spiritual, feel you need to pray with us, or have to defend God's case.
Do understand that it will take time for us even to begin to adjust to life, as it has to be for us from now on.	Don't feel you have to do something – just be there.
Do give us space to be as we are, tears and all – don't try to discourage our tears and please be willing to cry with us too.	Don't ignore the loss, or avoid asking about our child. Most bereaved parents long to talk and talk about the child who has died.
Do be sensitive and aware, e.g. Christmas cards – a mention of our child will let us know that you miss them at this time too.	Don't expect us to be over it – we will never get over it, but will find a 'new normal life' in time.
Do remember the Fathers! They can sometimes be neglected as they may not be so willing to talk. Give time to both parents.	Don't say – "Be strong" – (it means "Don't share your pain, keep it to yourself.")
Do take special care of those of us who parent alone. We have no-one to measure ourselves against to see how we're doing.	Don't assume that because we seem to be coping, we don't need your help. We have no choice but to keep the family going.

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Do make allowances for our children's behaviour. It may be very disruptive and difficult. They need lots of patience and love.	Don't forget to give time and attention to our children – we may be struggling with our feelings towards them.
Do invite us out to coffee or lunch – just to have a change of scene for a while.	Don't tell us that you've been too busy to phone or get in touch. Better to say, "We didn't know what to say."
Do still invite us to events and parties, but understand if sometimes we feel unable to go or have to leave early.	Don't avoid the issue with us just because there are other people around – at the school gate, in church, or at work.
Do remember that appearances can be deceptive – we may look as if we're coping okay, but inside we may be falling apart.	Don't ask how we are if you only want to hear, "I'm okay, thank you." Be prepared for the truth!
Do treat us as two individuals, even though we are a couple – we may be grieving in very different ways.	Don't assume that losing our child will draw us closer together as a couple. We each need your support and your help in our relationship.
Do remember that there is no time limit on grief – it will go on long after others expect. Please walk that road with us.	If you have a faith, don't just say, "I'm praying for you" – be prepared to be part of the answer by getting involved.
Do find ways to remember the anniversaries that the family will appreciate – be creative; we appreciate others' ideas.	Don't be afraid to show your emotions, cry with us and tell us how you feel.
Do be ready to listen to all the jumble of emotions we may be feeling, without trying to give answers.	Don't be judgemental of our behaviour, words, actions or attitudes – they will find a proper level in time.
Do be aware that siblings may react in ways that seem out of character – they have gone through the worst experience imaginable and may be very frightened and insecure.	Don't try to give us answers – it is unlikely that you will have any that will satisfy us. Just allow us to express all our fears, questions and doubts.
Do show sensitivity – ring first – don't just turn up at the door; although sometimes it may be just the break we need – be prepared for us to say that we can't cope with company just now.	Don't tell us to "count our blessings" as we have "other healthy children". We are grieving for the one who has gone and nothing will bring them back.
Do be aware that there will be times when we don't feel able to talk – but this doesn't mean we won't want to talk at another time.	Don't say you understand how we feel – whatever your loss, it will be different from ours as each person's grief is individual.
Do help with planning and suggestions for the funeral – you could spend months thinking of a wedding and just days for a funeral. The details are very important.	Don't think that the age of the child determines their value and the impact – the loss is also of our dreams and their potential.
Do encourage us to be kind to ourselves and not push ourselves to meet other people's expectations of how we should be.	Don't try to find something positive in our child's death.
Do let us know that you share our sense of loss and that you miss our child too. This can take away isolation and be a great support.	Don't think that death puts a ban on laughter. Remembering and enjoying the times we had together is important and helps us to heal.