

# Dos and Don'ts

# How you can help bereaved parents

We've spoken with many parents who have lost a child at different times of life and in varying circumstances. We listened as they told us what helps, and what doesn't help. Here's what they would love you to know.

## ✓ DO

- ✓ **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.
- ✓ **Do** keep in touch: keep phoning, especially as weeks turn into months and years. Be available.
- ✓ **Do** talk about those we have lost – we love to hear your memories of them.
- ✓ **Do** listen – it can be more important than what you say. Sometimes we just need to know that we are heard.
- ✓ **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.
- ✓ **Do** offer specific help – "I'll pick the children up on Friday, take them out, give them tea and bring them back at 6."
- ✓ **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.
- ✓ **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.
- ✓ **Do** be sensitive and aware, for example with Christmas cards – a mention of our child will let us know that you miss them at this time too.

## ✗ DON'T

✗ **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.



- ✗ **Don't** phone and just say, "Let me know if I can help".
- ✗ **Don't** worry about feeling 'awkward' – be normal, yourself, our friend – we are still the same people.
- ✗ **Don't** say things like, "You can always have another child." Loved ones are not replaceable.
- ✗ **Don't** wait to be asked to help – initially there is so much help we need with just about everything.
- ✗ **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

✓ **Do** remember the men! They can sometimes be neglected as they may not be so willing to talk.

✓ **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.

✓ **Do** make allowances for our children's behaviour. It may be very disruptive and difficult. They need lots of patience and love.

✓ **Do** still invite us to events and parties, but understand if sometimes we feel unable to go or have to leave early.

✓ **Do** remember that appearances can be deceptive – we may look as if we're coping OK, but inside we may be falling apart.

✓ **Do** treat couples as individuals; we may be grieving in very different ways.

✓ **Do** find ways to remember the anniversaries that the family will appreciate. Be creative – we appreciate others' ideas.

✓ **Do** be aware that children 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

✗ **Don't** be super-spiritual, feel you need to pray with us, or have to defend God's case.

✗ **Don't** ignore the loss, or avoid asking about our child. Most bereaved people long to talk and talk about the loved one who has died.

✗ **Don't** expect us to be over it – we will never get over it, but will find a 'new normal life' in time.

✗ **Don't** say, "Be strong" – it means, "Don't share your pain, keep it to yourself."

✗ **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.

✗ **Don't** forget to give time and attention to our children – we may be struggling with our feelings towards them.

✗ **Don't** avoid the issue with us just because there are other people around – at the school gate, in church, or at work.

✗ **Don't** ask how we are if you only want to hear, "I'm OK thank you." Be prepared for the truth!

✗ **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.

✗ **Don't** be afraid to show your emotions, cry with us and tell us how you feel.

✗ **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.

Find out more: [www.cff.org.uk/family-life/bereavement-support](http://www.cff.org.uk/family-life/bereavement-support)

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