

How to Demonstrate Support to a Grieving Family

Finding helpful actions and words can be difficult to find during a time of personal tragedy or hardship. Grief can take on many forms. We are frequently asked "I want to help but I don't know how". These are some ideas that we have found helpful. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list but please use these ideas as a guideline as you care for those who are hurting.

Helpful ACTIONS:

Pray. This is your greatest gift to them. Pray for their marriage, pray for their other children, pray for peace, pray for hope, just pray for them. Instead of just giving them Scripture, pray it for them.

Communicate. Use letters, emails, social media, text or calls, to demonstrate their importance to you; even though they may not reciprocate for a while. Handwritten notes mean the most but any type of communication is important to them.

Expect silence. These next two points may sound contradictory. Check on them but don't pressure them to do anything more than just breathe. Some days it's hard to do even that.

Pursue them. Don't give up on them, even after multiple refusals. After some time of silence, begin asking them to do things again. They will feel like they are drowning and pursuing them will help them to eventually emerge from the dark waters.

Listen. While no one would choose the pain of death or suffering, those who have experienced either have something profound to teach others. A glimpse into their humanity will give you more than you can imagine.

Organize meals/stock the fridge. Hospital food is expensive and honestly not the tastiest. If the family is at home, a cooler outside allows the family to remain inside or to visit with people.

Offer to help. Help with siblings, housework, and any kind of work! The sibling hurts too so provide something special just for them which allows parents time to openly express their feelings. Even though life stops for those who grieve, the work continues. Clean, mow or hire it for them.

Remember special anniversaries. The birthday and coming home day are days to remember. There is nothing more special than knowing others remember him or her. Even just a note saying you remember and are praying for them is so appreciated.

Accept. Realize no two paths of grief are the same. Remember the void in

their hearts that will not be filled. Resist the temptation to judge.

Helpful WORDS:

Positive words don't always help. Say things like, "I am so sorry", "I don't know what to say but I hurt with you" even "my heart is breaking for you". Anything is better than trying to say the right thing because honestly there is nothing right to say.

Spiritual words don't always help. At every moment of grieving, God is with them but it might not feel like it. Try saying, "I love you.", "I'm sorry." or "I'm thankful to witness your courage and bravery and strength."

Acknowledging the loss and pain always helps. People are afraid mentioning the deceased child will make the family sad but they think about him/her all the time. You might say, "What helps you feel closest to him when you miss him the most?" or "Hold on to me. I'll walk with you every step of the way."

Grieving people long to hear the name of the person who died and stories about them. Talk about their loved one by name. "I thought of John the other day when his favorite song came on the radio." "I saw a little boy with crystal blue eyes and thought of Sam." "Remember that time your mom danced at the concert and didn't care that anyone was watching? I loved that about her." Never be afraid to bring up the person's name or stories about them. It brings peace to the grieving person that their loved one is not forgotten.

Content adapted from these websites:

<http://stillstandingmag.com/2015/10/who-is-a-grieving-mother/>

<http://stillstandingmag.com/2014/01/6-things-never-say-bereaved-parent/>

<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/letter-to-a-parent-grieving-the-loss-of-a-child>

<http://brittanyspence.blogspot.com/2012/01/how-to-love-someone-who-has-lost-child.html>

<http://scottsauls.com/2016/09/13/a-mourners-thoughts-on-sickness-sorrow-pain-and-death/>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/yes-say-something-overcoming-awkwardness-grieving-people>