

# How you can help bereaved parents



## - things we'd like you to know

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[www.careforthefamily.org.uk](http://www.careforthefamily.org.uk)

Do	Don't
<b>Do</b> talk to us – even if you don't know what to say. Knowing that you are sorry about our loss is a good start.	<b>Don't</b> avoid us – it hurts so much when you cross the road when you see us coming, rather than be willing to face us.
<b>Do</b> keep in touch; keep phoning, especially as weeks turn into months and years. Be available.	<b>Don't</b> phone and then say “let me know if I can help”.
<b>Do</b> talk about our children – we love to hear your memories of them.	<b>Don't</b> worry about feeling ‘awkward’ – be normal, yourself, our friend – we are still the same people.
<b>Do</b> think carefully before you speak – we're feeling quite vulnerable at the moment and insensitivity could pull us down very low.	<b>Don't</b> 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.
<b>Do</b> listen – it can be more important than what you say. Sometimes we just need to know that we are heard.	<b>Don't</b> say things like – “You can always have another, you're young.” Children are not replaceable.
<b>Do</b> 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.	<b>Don't</b> wait to be asked to help – initially there is so much help we need with just about everything.
<b>Do</b> 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>	<b>Don't</b> overload us with responsibilities – for a while it will be all we can cope with to get out of bed and get dressed.
<b>Do</b> talk about everyday things <b>that matter</b> 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, <b>don't</b> be super-spiritual, feel you need to pray with us, or have to defend God's case.
<b>Do</b> 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.	<b>Don't</b> feel you have to do something – just be there.
<b>Do</b> 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.	<b>Don't</b> ignore the loss, or avoid asking about our child. Most bereaved parents long to talk and talk about the child who has died.
<b>Do</b> 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.	<b>Don't</b> expect us to be over it – we will never get over it, but will find a ‘new normal life’ in time.
<b>Do</b> remember the Fathers! They can sometimes be neglected as they may not be so willing to talk. Give time to both parents.	<b>Don't</b> say – “Be strong” – (it means “Don't share your pain, keep it to yourself.”)
<b>Do</b> take special care of those of us who parent alone. We have no-one to measure ourselves against to see how we're doing.	<b>Don't</b> 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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<b>Do</b> make allowances for our children's behaviour. It may be very disruptive and difficult. They need lots of patience and love.	<b>Don't</b> forget to give time and attention to our children – we may be struggling with our feelings towards them.
<b>Do</b> invite us out to coffee or lunch – just to have a change of scene for a while.	<b>Don't</b> tell us that you've been too busy to phone or get in touch. Better to say, "We didn't know what to say."
<b>Do</b> still invite us to events and parties, but understand if sometimes we feel unable to go or have to leave early.	<b>Don't</b> avoid the issue with us just because there are other people around – at the school gate, in church, or at work.
<b>Do</b> remember that appearances can be deceptive – we may look as if we're coping okay, but inside we may be falling apart.	<b>Don't</b> ask how we are if you only want to hear, "I'm okay, thank you." Be prepared for the truth!
<b>Do</b> treat us as two individuals, even though we are a couple – we may be grieving in very different ways.	<b>Don't</b> assume that losing our child will draw us closer together as a couple. We each need your support and your help in our relationship.
<b>Do</b> 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, <b>don't</b> just say, "I'm praying for you" – be prepared to be part of the answer by getting involved.
<b>Do</b> find ways to remember the anniversaries that the family will appreciate – be creative; we appreciate others' ideas.	<b>Don't</b> be afraid to show your emotions, cry with us and tell us how you feel.
<b>Do</b> be ready to listen to all the jumble of emotions we may be feeling, without trying to give answers.	<b>Don't</b> be judgemental of our behaviour, words, actions or attitudes – they will find a proper level in time.
<b>Do</b> 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.	<b>Don't</b> 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.
<b>Do</b> 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.	<b>Don't</b> 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.
<b>Do</b> 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.	<b>Don't</b> say you understand how we feel – whatever your loss, it will be different from ours as each person's grief is individual.
<b>Do</b> 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.	<b>Don't</b> think that the age of the child determines their value and the impact – the loss is also of our dreams and their potential.
<b>Do</b> encourage us to be kind to ourselves and not push ourselves to meet other people's expectations of how we should be.	<b>Don't</b> try to find something positive in our child's death.
<b>Do</b> 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.	<b>Don't</b> think that death puts a ban on laughter. Remembering and enjoying the times we had together is important and helps us to heal.