

GIVING GOOD GRIEF SUPPORT

The following is based on the feedback from a broad network of parents who've shared what helped and what didn't help them. So while this a reflection of a broad group of people with varied experiences, there were common threads. Before delving into each of the points please hear the overwhelming message from everyone who shared.

The single most important thing you can do...show up

WHAT DOES SHOWING UP LOOK LIKE?

- Mention my child's name. Share the memories you have. There isn't a single thing I treasure more than knowing my child is remembered.
- Listen to me, whether I'm laughing or crying. I need to feel a wide range of emotions and feel safe experiencing them all.
- Let me talk about my child the same way you talk about those who are still alive. He/she is still just as real in my life.
- Set up a standing date to just be together. Sometimes I may not even mention my loss and other times I may be overwhelmed with thoughts of him/her. Knowing I have somewhere to be with someone who holds space for me is such a relief and develops a sense of safety and ability to process my grief.
- If you have a question, ask me if I mind you asking about something. It's still sometimes hard to talk about subjects, but you showing interest in my journey makes a difference. In time I may open up because you've shown interest and asked. It can provide good opportunities for communication and processing my journey.

TANGIBLE WAYS TO HELP

First and foremost, don't ask me if I need help. I do! It's sometimes hard to accept help or think of specific help I need. Instead, offer something specific in a specific time frame...in a respectful way that doesn't overstep boundaries or my privacy. That's a delicate and hard balance to navigate I know. So here are a few ideas:

- Send me periodic messages you are thinking of me. They don't have to be deep and meaningful words of wisdom; in fact I'd really prefer they weren't. I just want to know someone cares. This includes all the times beyond holidays, birthdays and anniversaries. Maybe even a quick text the calendar day of death or birth every month.
- Drop a card in the mail, not just around the funeral, or even death or birth dates but at any given

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moment it crosses your mind. Again, I always feel better knowing people out there care and remember.

- Dropping off meals or gift certificates to restaurants is wonderful. No visit necessary. The meal train always stops soon after the funeral. A few meals a month through the first year would be nice. Believe it or not, some days getting out of bed is still hard...even a year later.
- In the beginning mundane tasks are awful. Cleaning, grocery shopping, mowing the lawn. Either step in and do it for me (without expecting me to visit with you) or hire someone to do it for me.
- Call and keep calling...even if I don't return calls right away. When I do talk, listen even when it's uncomfortable for you.
- Do I have other kids? Offer to take them to practices, events or even with your family so they feel "normal".
- Compile a book of memories or stories of my child from people who knew him/her and give it to me.

WHAT NOT TO DO

- Don't ignore what happened. Trust me, I haven't forgotten and you aren't reminding me of something that isn't already on my mind every moment of every day.
- Don't start crying or fall apart when I'm not. Show you care, but don't get overly emotional about my loss. **I don't want to have to feel like I need to comfort you over my loss.** I don't want to take care of someone else. I don't have the energy, and frankly it's not fair.
- Don't give advice, just listen and empathize.
- Don't tell me: "He's at peace now", "She's in a better place now", or "He's out of pain now". First, it doesn't take away the pain. It just makes me feel more alone than ever knowing you have NO IDEA how little those platitudes matter. Secondly, your belief system may not be mine; you have no idea where he/she is.

GRIEF IS NOT EASY FOR ANYONE BUT BEING A KIND, THOUGHTFUL FRIEND WILL ALWAYS BE REMEMBERED. AND PLEASE FORGIVE US FOR THE TIMES WE SEEM NOT TO CARE, OR COME ACROSS AS UNGRATEFUL OR RUDE. OUR MINDS AND HEARTS ARE OVERWHELMED. YOU ARE APPRECIATED.