

Supporting a Family Grieving the Loss of a Child

Kids Path

How to Offer Your Support

1. Don't assume what the family needs, always ask. It's also important to remember that the family's needs will change throughout the course of their grief, so ask frequently.
2. Offer to help with practical things such as running errands, child care for other children in the home, meal preparation, etc.
3. Give special attention to the other children in the family and remember that they are grieving too. Avoid telling them not to cry or not to upset the adults.
4. Be available to listen. Sometimes all that is necessary is a squeeze of the hand, a hug or your presence. Accept whatever feelings are expressed. Do not say, "You shouldn't feel like that."
5. Remember that sometimes the family needs permission to be normal, and not to constantly talk about the child's illness and their grief. Respect this need if a parent says, "I don't want to talk about it right now."

Do's and Don'ts for Friends of Grieving Parents

Do's

- Do let your concern and caring show.
- Do be available to listen and help with whatever seems needed at the time.
- Do allow parents to express the grief they are feeling.

Don'ts

- Don't let your own sense of helplessness keep you from reaching out to the family.
- Don't change the subject when parents talk about their child and his or her illness or death.
- Don't avoid mentioning the child.
- Don't try to find something positive (such as a moral lesson) about their loss.

What Do I Say? Tips for Providing Support

- "I don't know what to say."
- "I'm sorry. This is just terrible."
- "What can I do for you right now?"
- "I'm here. I want to listen."
- "I can't really imagine it, but this loss must be so hard for you."
- "I care."



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