

# Supporting someone who is grieving the loss of a child

The death of a child is a hard time for everyone and you may find yourself worried about doing or saying the wrong thing. Nothing can take the pain and sadness away but knowing that people care can provide comfort and support.

No one can anticipate how a person will feel or react after the death of a child and the death can affect parents, siblings, other family members and friends in different ways. Grieving can last a long time and for many people may never come to an end. Close friends and family are a good source of support.

## Reach out

Even if you're not sure what to say, reaching out to the family is helpful. Simple gestures like a text, an email, or a card are some ways of showing that you care. Hearing "I've been thinking about you" can be a source of comfort and strength.

Helping to keep sibling's routines as normal as possible can also be a great way to show your support. Offering to take them to their after-school activities is an easy way to assist.

The family will sometimes need to talk about their experiences, and other times they will choose not to. Watch for signs if they want to talk, have a distraction or just want some quiet company.

## Respect

Be respectful of the family, their home, their routine, and their need for privacy. It is a good idea to check with the family before visiting. Be prepared that it might not be a good day for visitors, or they might be too busy.

Don't be discouraged if they ask you not to visit. Every day is different for families who are grieving. Stay engaged with the family and continue to offer support.

Some things that may help:

- › Acknowledging the death and expressing your care
- › Being genuine in your communication and not hiding your feelings
- › Allowing them to talk and express their thoughts and feelings as much as they are able
- › Being available to listen, run errands, help with siblings or whatever is needed at the time
- › Talking about your memories of their child
- › Using the child's name in conversation
- › Remembering important days for the child and family (e.g. birthdays, Mother's and Father's Day)
- › Recognising that grief has no time limit and varies from person to person
- › Continuing to show support beyond the first few months

Sometimes parents may feel disconnected from their friends. Don't forget to include them in 'everyday' activities. This may include meeting up for a coffee, going for a walk or going to the movies.

Some things that may not help:

- › Waiting until you know the perfect thing to say
- › Not acknowledging the death
- › Changing the subject when the family mention their child
- › Making any comments which suggest blame or fault
- › Saying that you know how they feel
- › Making judgements about the progress of their grief
- › Telling them not to cry or show emotion
- › Thinking that good news cancels out grief
- › Pointing out that they have other children