

Ten ways to support a grieving parent

Our Director of Services Development, and clinical psychologist, Dr Lynda Teape offers guidance on how to support a grieving parent.

1. Acknowledge your own grief and discomfort. This will likely bring up lots of difficult feelings for you and so it's important to make sure that you are looking after yourself. You likely knew the child and care for the family and so seeing them in pain, will be painful for you too.



2. It is normal to experience anxiety about how to support someone after the death of a child and you have probably never had to do this before. Nobody tells us how to do this. You may be worried about saying or doing the wrong thing. It is normal to want to avoid doing anything for fear of getting it wrong.

3. Consider what kind of friend you want to be or what you might want from a friend under similar circumstances. Use this to guide how you reach out to your friend, rather than your fears. You may want to be kind, present, supportive, practical, pragmatic.

4. It's okay to say that you don't know what to say. Your presence is more important than wise words. There is nothing you can say to make it better. There is very little you can say to make it worse either, as the worst has already happened. Just showing up and being willing to sit with them, cry, listen and bear witness to their pain, will be more than enough.

5. You will most likely want to relieve their suffering and may feel helpless when you cannot do this. Sitting with someone in pain is really hard; it doesn't mean you're doing something wrong.



6. Don't take it personally if they don't respond to calls or messages and don't give up trying either. Many people withdraw into themselves during grief but when they are ready, they will remember that you kept trying and that you've left the door open for them to seek you out.

7. It's okay to talk about their child. They are already in pain and by avoiding talking about their child, won't make them feel better. Talking about their child also won't make them feel any worse and could be a huge relief to have someone willing to listen.

8. You can offer to help in very practical ways. You might bring shopping, cook meals, walk dogs, clean laundry or collect siblings from school. Some people won't have the energy to have conversations or even open the door, so you can drop hot meals on the doorstep, post takeaway vouchers or just send a thoughtful message without expectation of a reply.

9. If you have your own children who may be friends with the child who has died or their siblings, it is really important that you take the time to have a conversation with them, in an age-appropriate way. It can be very difficult and confusing for them if they overhear adult conversations. We have resources to support you with this on our website.

10. Grieving for a child can be a long and hard journey and so don't be surprised if it takes a long time for the person you know to return to you again. It is quite likely that they will never be the same again. While your friendship may change, remember it can be deeper and richer, for having gone through this alongside them.



If you are concerned about yourself or your friend at any point following the death of their child, then it is important to seek help or advice from a healthcare professional.

You can:

- Call your own GP during working hours
- Call 111 or your out of hours GP service
- In an emergency, you should visit your nearest A&E or call 999
- Or, call the Samaritans 24/7 on 116 123.

