



Helpful Tips for Interacting with Bereaved Families

EXPRESS CONDOLENCES AND SHOW YOU CARE

Sometimes friends or family members may avoid contact with a bereaved parent or the topic of the loss in fear of reopening a wound or causing more distress. Show care and compassion by acknowledging the loss and their pain.

REFER TO THE CHILD BY NAME

Expressing condolences using the child's name is important for grieving parents because it gives their child an identity and honors their life.

ACTIVELY LISTEN AND BE SUPPORTIVE

Show bereaved parents and family members that you are actively listening and engaged in the conversation. Be patient, genuine and allow for tears. Avoid asking questions which could reinforce guilt, and remember: it is okay to have a pause or moment of silence to reflect.

UNDERSTAND THAT EACH PARENT AND FAMILY MEMBER WILL GRIEVE IN THEIR OWN WAY

The death of a child can cause many different reactions and can manifest in a wide range of symptoms that may persist years after the loss. Your continued support will not go unnoticed.

DON'T FORGET, FATHERS GRIEVE TOO

While mothers are typically identified as experiencing more intense or emotional reactions to the loss of a child, be aware that fathers are also grieving and have emotions that need to be validated.

BE YOURSELF

Don't be afraid to share good news or make a bereaved parent or family member laugh. If it feels appropriate, tell them about your day or something silly/exciting/funny that has happened recently. Hearing about your life can be comforting and momentarily distracting.

DON'T OVERLOOK THE SIBLINGS

Family and friends often focus their direct support to the parents and may unintentionally overlook other children in the home. As a result, a grieving sibling may end up feeling as though the grief of others is more important than their own. Make sure siblings are, in some way, part of the grieving process.

KEEP IN MIND: WORDS MATTER

Be mindful that some words and questions may cause more harm and may have the opposite effect of what you intended. Avoid preaching, lecturing, and over-interpreting a bereaved parent or family member's feelings. Steer clear of phrases such as: "Everything happens for a reason," "Be happy you ever had them in your life," and "You can always try again"- which can diminish a person's pain and grief.

REMEMBER: IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO REACH OUT



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