

WHAT TO SAY TO SOMEONE WHO HAS LOST A LOVED ONE

It is common to feel awkward when trying to comfort someone who is grieving. Many people do not know what to say or do. The following are suggestions to use as a guide:

- Acknowledge the situation and express your concern. Example: “I heard about [child’s name] and I’m sorry.” Or “I just wanted to say I was sorry about [child’s name].”
- Use the child’s name as this helps keep their memory alive.
- Be genuine in your communication and don’t hide your feelings. Example: “I’m not sure what to say, but I want you to know I care.” Remember, caring thoughts and hugs may make the person cry, but tears are part of the healing process.
- Offer your support, and be specific. Example: “I would like to help you and your family; can I pick up your children from school this week?”
- Don’t assume you know how the bereaved person feels on any given day.
- Remember that a smile and “It’s good to see you” can make any person’s day a little brighter.

Comments to AVOID when comforting a bereaved parent

Even though you have the best intentions when comforting someone who has experienced a loss, these often common phrases can be hurtful and aggravating to hear. Try not use the following sentiments:

- **“I know how you feel.”** Instead, say that “I’m sorry, I can’t even imagine what you’re going through.”
- **“It’s part of God’s plan.”** Faith is very personal and the bereaved may not share your beliefs. It’s also not uncommon for people to question their faith during times like these.
- **“Look at what you have to be thankful for” or “At least you have your other children.”** They know they have things to be thankful for, but right now they are not important. And one child certainly does not replace another.
- **“At least you had your child for X years.”** When this was said to one of our members, she thought to herself, “And what year would you choose for your own child to die?”
- **“He’s in a better place now.”** It’s hard for any parent to believe that there is a better place for their child than with them.
- **“This is behind you now.”** The loss of a child is never behind a parent. It will always be a part of them.
- **“You’ll get over it.”** Although a parent will eventually move beyond acute grief, losing a child is not something a parent ever gets over.
- **Statements that begin with “You should” or “You will.”** These statements are too directive. Instead you could begin your comments with: “Have you thought about...” or “You might...”
- **“You can have another baby.”** One child cannot replace another.

How to help a grieving child

When a child in your life is experiencing grief, there are things you can do to help as a family member, family friend, or community member. If you are a parent of a grieving child, visit the link “For a Grieving Child” to learn more about how to help them.

- Speak to parents or guardians first before speaking to children. Make sure you understand and respect what the child knows, what they don’t know, and how you can best support them in their time of need.
- Use the given name of the deceased when speaking of him or her.
- Be willing to hear and discuss a child’s feelings and encourage him or her to talk about the person who died. Recalling memories (both good ones and trouble-making ones) might have great value to one child while others might not be ready to talk about the person. Be conscious of their response and encourage the child to share with his or her parents whenever possible.
- Set aside time to check-in with the family regularly to see how they are coping. Respect information that a child may share with you in confidence but always remember that you have a responsibility to protect the child’s physical and emotional wellbeing; you may need to share some information with a parent or guardian.
- Give children facts in a simple manner – be careful not to go into too much detail. Children will ask more questions when they are ready to do so.
- Keep your involvement in the child’s daily life as routine as possible.
- Pay attention to the child’s actions and behavior. Respect family boundaries but let the child’s parents know if you notice a change that worries you.

What NOT to do

- Don’t force a child to publicly mourn if he or she doesn’t want to.
- Don’t give false or confusing messages, like “Sally went to sleep.”
- Don’t tell a child to stop crying because others might get upset.
- Don’t try to shield a child from the loss. Children pick up on much more than adults realize. Including them in the grieving process will help them adapt and heal.
- Don’t stifle your tears; by crying in front of your child, you send the message that it’s okay for him or her to express feelings, too. At the same time, try not to sob or lose control in front of your child; it’s too scary for him or her.
- Don’t turn your child into your personal confidante. Rely on another adult or a support group instead.
- Don’t tell a child they have grieved too long or to “get over it.”

Practical ways to help a grieving person. You can offer to:

- Shop for groceries or run errands.
- Ask what the family likes to eat and offer to drop off a prearranged meal on a specific day. Best of all is to arrange a schedule for friends/neighbors to do the same.
- Help with funeral arrangements.
- Buy stamps and offer to make labels for acknowledgment cards.
- Help set up an event, memorial and/or charitable fund for the family.
- Stay in their home to take phone calls and receive guests.
- Help with insurance forms or bills.
- Take care of housework, such as cleaning or laundry.
- Watch their children or pick them up from school.
- Drive them wherever they need to go.
- Look after their pets.
- Go with them to a support group meeting.
- Accompany them on a walk.
- Arrange to take them to lunch or a movie with the understanding that it may be cancelled if the person is not up to it that day.
- Share an enjoyable activity (game, puzzle, art project).

Possible Condolences

IMMEDIATE

As stated above, it is very common to feel awkward when trying to comfort someone who is grieving. Many people do not know what to say or do. The following are *additional possible suggestions* to use as a guide:

- I am so sorry to hear of your loss
- I am stunned by this news. I am so very sorry for your loss
- My heart aches to hear this news. I am praying for everyone.
- I love you and I am here for you.
- Please know that your friends love you and are here for you.
- I am so sorry. My heart goes out to you.
- My deepest sympathies to you and your family.
- God bless you and your family.
- My thoughts and prayers are with you in your time of grief.
- I am so sorry for your loss. I am going to miss her/him too.
- I wish you peace and comfort as you grieve.
- Please accept our deepest condolences for your loss.
- What a beautiful life s/he lived. I am so very sorry for your loss.
- My heart is heavy today, and I know your is too.
- Words cannot describe how sorry I am at this loss. You are in my prayers.

- As you go through this difficult time, remember that you are so loved.
- You and your family are in my thoughts you grieve this loss. All my love.
- I wish I could be there to comfort you as you grieve I am holding you in my heart.
- What a great loss to the world. S/he will be missed by so many.
- My heart goes out to you and to everyone who loved her/him. This is such a huge loss.
- What a lovely person, who will be deeply missed.

Possible condolences

SUDDEN LOSS

- I am so sorry to hear of this unexpected loss. Please accept my heartfelt condolences.
- My heart goes out to you after this sudden loss. You're in my thoughts and prayers.
- I was so saddened to hear this shocking news. My heart goes out to you at this time of grief.
- This is such a shock. All my best wishes to you and your family.

Possible condolences

LOSS OF A CHILD

- I am so terribly sorry for your loss.
- There are no words for such an unimaginable loss. You're in my thoughts/prayers/heart.
- My heart aches for you and your family. You are in my prayers.
- It has been such a joy in my life to know your beautiful child. S/he has been a light in the world, and still is.
- Please know I'm here for you and I'm thinking of you all the time.

Possible condolences

LOSS OF A SPOUSE

- I am so sorry to hear of your loss. Remembering your great love story today and always.
- A lifetime together is never enough, I am thinking of both of you with so much love.
- Your loving marriage was in inspiration to me.
- I know your love will always continue, even though you are parted.
- I'll always remember the love in your eyes when you loved at each other.
- Your true love story is beautiful to all who know you. I am keeping you in my thoughts.

Possible condolences

LOSS OF A PARENT

- I have such precious childhood memories of your mom/dad. I know you will miss her/him so much.
- Your mom/dad was such an incredible person. No one can ever replace him/her
- I never met your mom/dad, but I can tell how wonderful s/he must have been just by knowing you. We reflect the best parts of our parents thanks to the loving way they raised us. Take comfort in your memories as you grieve.
- Although I do not know you well, your mother/father was one of my closest friends and s/he spoke of you often. I know s/he loved you so much and prepared you to handle this tragic loss. You're in my thoughts and prayers.
- No matter how old we are, it's never easy to lose a parent. My thoughts and prayers are with you as you grieve.
- Your father/mother was like a second dad/mom to me growing up. I've always remembered the good times and the lessons s/he taught me. All my love in this hard time.

Possible condolences

LOSS OF A SIBLING

- My deepest condolences on the loss of your sister/brother.
- I'm so glad I had a chance to know your sister/brother. He/she was a special person who will be so sorely missed.
- I wish I had been able to meet your sister/brother. I know from your stories how special s/he was.
- Our siblings carry a piece of our hearts in theirs. Thinking of you and your family.

Possible condolences

SUICIDE LOSS

- This is so unfair. My heart hurts for you.
- I'm so sorry for your loss. I pray that s/he has found peace.
- I can't imagine the pain you're feeling. I'm here if you need to talk.

Possible condolences

LOSS OF A PET

- Our pets are some of our very best friends. Thinking of you as you grieve.
- I know your sweet pet was a member of your family, and it hurts so much to lose her/him. You're in my thoughts and prayers.
- You gave your pet such a wonderful life, full of love and comfort. I know he/she loved you for it. All my best as you grieve this loss.

ANNIVERSARY OF A DEATH

- I know today is a very hard day. There are so many precious memories. I'm here for you today and always.
- Your friends still have you in their thoughts and prayers. Please reach out if we can help.
- Your loved ones haven't forgotten you, and you're in my heart on this sad anniversary.
- I know your grief still continues. I'm holding you up in my prayers as you remember a wonderful life.

Formal sympathy prayers, quotes, etc. to include in cards

- "Death ends a life, not a relationship." —Mitch Albom
- Gone too soon — but his/her love lives on. You're in my thoughts.
- As long as you live, your loved one will live on through you.
- The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. Psalms 34:18
- I was so sorry to hear of your loss. The thoughts of many are with you.
- We will cherish their memories forever.
- Remembering you and your loved one today and always.
- "What is lovely never dies, but passes into another loveliness, star-dust or sea-foam, flower or winged air." —Thomas Bailey Aldrich
- My condolences as you grieve.
- Don't let go of your precious memories. They'll get you through this difficult time.
- I know words can't take away the hurt you're feeling, but I want you to know how much I care. Sending you love and strength in this time of loss.
- My heart is breaking for you. I'm praying for you and hoping you'll find some comfort.
- "I know for certain that we never lose the people we love, even to death. They continue to participate in every act, thought and decision we make. Their love leaves an indelible imprint in our memories." —Leo Buscaglia
- I'm lighting a candle in your dear loved one's honor.
- His/her life was far too short, but it made a big impact on the world. I'll always remember him/her.
- Even as I'm shedding tears for your loss, I'm honored to remember one of the best people I ever met.
- I'm so sorry for your great loss. Remember that I'm just a phone call away if you need to talk