



The Compassionate Friends

Offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents

SUGGESTIONS FOR FAMILY, FRIENDS AND PROFESSIONAL PEOPLE

NO DEATH SO SAD

In the kind of society we have today, parents do not expect their children to die before them. (It is important to remember that any parent who outlives their son or daughter, irrespective of the age of either child or parent at the time of loss, is a bereaved parent.) And, perhaps, there is no death so hard to 'come to terms with'.

Every year, thousands of parents face the loss of their beloved children; every year these parents have to try to rebuild their shattered lives. It's not easy. The friends and relatives who offered to help and support immediately after the tragedy drift away and the grieving parents may be left feeling isolated and alone in their pain. Yet, while they need to talk about the way they feel about the child they have lost, others often feel embarrassed to talk of the dead, or perhaps they are afraid of saying something that will hurt the bereaved family. They change the subject or start to avoid the parents altogether. To help people who know bereaved parents, The Compassionate Friends has drawn up a list of suggested "Do's" and "Don'ts".

DO:

- Say you are sorry about what happened to their child and about their pain
- Let your concern and sharing show
- Be available – to listen, run errands, help with other children – or whatever else seems needed at the time
- Allow them to express as much grief as they are feeling at the moment and are willing to share
- Encourage them to be patient with themselves and not to expect too much
- Allow them to talk about the child they have lost as much and as often as they want to
- Talk about the special qualities of that child
- Give extra attention if there are surviving brothers or sisters (they too are hurt and confused and in need of attention which their parents may not be able to give at this time)
- Reassure them that they did everything they could (if you know this to be true) and tell them of everything right and positive about the care given to their child
- Be available when they want to take 'time off' from grieving and encourage them not to feel guilty or disloyal; babysit if necessary, while they go on an outing or accompany them if that is fitting
- Encourage the parents to spend some time alone together. The death of a child puts a marriage under great strain and it needs to be attended to and cared for
- Remember to acknowledge the child's birth date and anniversary by sending a card, letter or flowers, or by making a phone call. As the years go by, such gestures become even more meaningful to the bereaved parents

DON'T

- Let your own sense of helplessness or discomfort keep you from reaching out to a bereaved parent. (Being avoided by friends adds pain to an already almost intolerably painful experience)
- Say you know how they feel unless you have lost a child yourself
- Regale them with stories of other peoples' misfortunes or losses; they have enough to do coping with their own
- Say 'You ought to be feeling better by now' or 'You must pull yourself together' or anything else which implies a judgement
- Tell them how they should feel or what they should do
- Change the subject when they mention their dead child
- Avoid mentioning their child's name because you are scared of reminding them of their pain (they won't have forgotten it)
- Try to find something positive about the death (e.g. closer family ties, a moral lesson, etc.)
- Point out that they can have another child (it won't replace the one they've lost)
- Tell them they must be grateful if they have other children (children are not interchangeable, they cannot replace each other)
- Make any comments which in any way suggest that the care given to their child at home, in hospital or wherever, was inadequate (parents are plagued by their feelings of doubt and guilt without any help from their family and friends)
- Tell them that their child is better off where he/she is

Barriers between the bereaved and other people are not created by feelings themselves, but by the attempt to deny them.

'WE NEED NOT WALK ALONE' Credo of The Compassionate Friends

We need not Walk alone. We are The Compassionate Friends. We reach out to each other with love, with understanding and with hope. Our children have died at all ages and from many different causes, but our love for our children unites us. Your pain becomes my pain just as your hope becomes my hope. We come together from all walks of life, from many different circumstances. We are a unique family because we represent many races and creeds. We are young, and we are old. Some of us are far along in our grief, but others still feel a grief so fresh and so intensely painful that we feel helpless and see no hope.

Some of us have found our faith to be a source of strength. Some of us are struggling to find answers. Some of us are angry, filled with guilt or in deep depression; others radiate an inner peace. But whatever pain we bring to this gathering of The Compassionate Friends, it is pain we will share just as we share with each other our love for our children. We are all seeking and struggling to build a future for ourselves, but we are committed to building that future together as we reach out to each other in love and share the pain as well as the joy, share the anger as well as the peace, share the faith as well as the doubts, and help each other to grieve as well as to grow.

We need not walk alone.

We are The Compassionate Friends.

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