

How you can help bereaved parents

- things we'd like you to know

Please visit our web page to download more copies of this sheet

Tel: (029) 2081 0800
www.careforthefamily.org.uk/bps

| Do | Don't |
|---|---|
| Do talk to us – even if you don't know what to say. Knowing that you are sorry about our loss is a good start. | Don't avoid us – it hurts so much when you cross the road when you see us coming, rather than be willing to face us. |
| Do keep in touch; keep phoning, especially as weeks turn into months and years. Be available. | Don't phone and then say “let me know if I can help”. |
| Do talk about our children – we love to hear your memories of them. | Don't worry about feeling ‘awkward’ – be normal, yourself, our friend – we are still the same people. |
| Do think carefully before you speak – we're feeling quite vulnerable at the moment and insensitivity could pull us down very low. | Don't come out with platitudes, trite answers about it “being for the best” or “seeing each other again one day”. We long to see them now. |
| Do listen – it can be more important than what you say. Sometimes we just need to know that we are heard. | Don't say things like – “You can always have another, you're young.” Children are not replaceable. |
| Do give practical support. We're not able to cope with routines at the moment so providing meals, help at home and with our children, is vital. | Don't wait to be asked to help – initially there is so much help we need with just about everything. |
| Do offer specific help – <i>“I'll pick the children up on Friday, take them out, give them tea and bring them back at 6.”</i> | Don't overload us with responsibilities – for a while it will be all we can cope with to get out of bed and get dressed. |
| Do talk about everyday things that matter as well – we're still interested in you and what is going on around us, but ‘small talk’ can seem very trivial. | If you have a faith, don't be super-spiritual, feel you need to pray with us, or have to defend God's case. |
| Do understand that it will take time for us even to begin to adjust to life, as it has to be for us from now on. | Don't feel you have to do something – just be there. |
| Do give us space to be as we are, tears and all – don't try to discourage our tears and please be willing to cry with us too. | Don't ignore the loss, or avoid asking about our child. Most bereaved parents long to talk and talk about the child who has died. |
| Do be sensitive and aware, e.g. Christmas cards – a mention of our child will let us know that you miss them at this time too. | Don't expect us to be over it – we will never get over it, but will find a ‘new normal life’ in time. |
| Do remember the Fathers! They can sometimes be neglected as they may not be so willing to talk. Give time to both parents. | Don't say – “Be strong” – (it means “Don't share your pain, keep it to yourself.”) |
| Do take special care of those of us who parent alone. We have no-one to measure ourselves against to see how we're doing. | Don't assume that because we seem to be coping, we don't need your help. We have no choice but to keep the family going. |

| Do | Don't |
|---|---|
| Do make allowances for our children's behaviour. It may be very disruptive and difficult. They need lots of patience and love. | Don't forget to give time and attention to our children – we may be struggling with our feelings towards them. |
| Do invite us out to coffee or lunch – just to have a change of scene for a while. | Don't tell us that you've been too busy to phone or get in touch. Better to say, "We didn't know what to say." |
| Do still invite us to events and parties, but understand if sometimes we feel unable to go or have to leave early. | Don't avoid the issue with us just because there are other people around – at the school gate, in church, or at work. |
| Do remember that appearances can be deceptive – we may look as if we're coping okay, but inside we may be falling apart. | Don't ask how we are if you only want to hear, "I'm okay, thank you." Be prepared for the truth! |
| Do treat us as two individuals, even though we are a couple – we may be grieving in very different ways. | Don't assume that losing our child will draw us closer together as a couple. We each need your support and your help in our relationship. |
| Do remember that there is no time limit on grief – it will go on long after others expect. Please walk that road with us. | If you have a faith, don't just say, "I'm praying for you" – be prepared to be part of the answer by getting involved. |
| Do find ways to remember the anniversaries that the family will appreciate – be creative; we appreciate others' ideas. | Don't be afraid to show your emotions, cry with us and tell us how you feel. |
| Do be ready to listen to all the jumble of emotions we may be feeling, without trying to give answers. | Don't be judgemental of our behaviour, words, actions or attitudes – they will find a proper level in time. |
| Do be aware that siblings may react in ways that seem out of character – they have gone through the worst experience imaginable and may be very frightened and insecure. | Don't try to give us answers – it is unlikely that you will have any that will satisfy us. Just allow us to express all our fears, questions and doubts. |
| Do show sensitivity – ring first – don't just turn up at the door; although sometimes it may be just the break we need – be prepared for us to say that we can't cope with company just now. | Don't tell us to "count our blessings" as we have "other healthy children". We are grieving for the one who has gone and nothing will bring them back. |
| Do be aware that there will be times when we don't feel able to talk – but this doesn't mean we won't want to talk at another time. | Don't say you understand how we feel – whatever your loss, it will be different from ours as each person's grief is individual. |
| Do help with planning and suggestions for the funeral – you could spend months thinking of a wedding and just days for a funeral. The details are very important. | Don't think that the age of the child determines their value and the impact – the loss is also of our dreams and their potential. |
| Do encourage us to be kind to ourselves and not push ourselves to meet other people's expectations of how we should be. | Don't try to find something positive in our child's death. |
| Do let us know that you share our sense of loss and that you miss our child too. This can take away isolation and be a great support. | Don't think that death puts a ban on laughter. Remembering and enjoying the times we had together is important and helps us to heal. |