

How Can I Help? Can I Help?

Grief is challenging on several levels: nothing can be “fixed”; there is no time line; grief is very personal; and there is no telling what may trigger sad and painful feelings. Grief becomes different over time. The individuality of grief and where a person is along the path makes it difficult to know exactly how to support someone. Another potential roadblock to impede helping someone is our own inhibitions about death and being unsure how to approach a grieving person. It may be easier to ignore that person, a mumbled “Hello”, no eye contact and then get on with our own lives. It is hoped that the following will assist you when you come into contact with someone who has suffered a loss.

1. **Do step forward**, approach the individual, put out your hand or offer them a hug, if the situation is appropriate. Make eye contact and say, “*I am so sorry!*” Often that will be enough to allow the person to start any conversation as they might need.
2. **Be a good listener**. This rule applies in so many areas of our lives and is especially important when listening to a bereaved person. Don't add to their situation by recounting stories of your own. This is the time to listen, to perhaps once again say, “*I am so sorry*” or, “*It isn't fair*”. Listening is such a gift. **Don't be afraid to use the deceased's name**. This validates their existence. If you don't know the deceased's name, don't be afraid to ask – “*What did you name your Baby?*” Families need, and usually want, to speak of their lost one.
3. **Be prepared to make yourself available**. Make sure you don't give the impression of “*hurrying*” or speeding them along because you need to be elsewhere or because you feel uncomfortable. Stay in the moment.
4. **Try not to feel guilty**, including if your baby(ies) is healthy. You did not cause this to happen, it is not your fault, but you can make a positive support difference.
5. **Accept the words shared with you**. A grieving individual may be railing against God, life, the world, the doctors. Don't make harsh judgements. Just accept the words as they come. In an effort to get “*rid*” of pain it is not unusual to make rash and/or harsh statements.
6. **There are many concrete ways in which one can support**: take care of other children for a while, bring over a meal in a dish that does not need to be returned, send a card, attend the wake and/or funeral, make a cup of tea. **Ask how you can help**.
7. **Try not to forget them** after the initial six weeks or so beyond their loss. Grieving people still need us as they try to assimilate their “new normal”. A “*How are you doing?*” a few weeks down the road can be important.
8. **Don't minimize the loss** – “You can have more children.” “It's better this way, your baby was sick.” “At least he is in a better place.” “God needed her more than you did.” It is not unusual for the individual to have bathed, held and rocked him. Families with survivors of multiple births are sometimes not given proper space to grieve their loss as they have a survivor(s). Children are not interchangeable and to imply so will only make matters worse.
9. **Don't forget to acknowledge the father/partner's grief**. Sometimes mothers are consoled while Dad is expected to “*Hang tough*”. He, too, has experienced the death of his child and also experiences feelings of loss and pain. He has the added burden of society's expectations that he can “*cope*”. He may be juggling a child(ren) at home, baby in NICU, his job, planning a funeral, his wife recovering from a c-section and also needs acknowledgement and support.



10. **There are no shortcuts through grieving.** Allow the bereaved individual as long or as short a period as they need. Be patient. Avoid sharing how they “*should*” feel or act or what they “*should*” do to make things easier. Also avoid saying, “*You are handling it so well*” as this puts people into a box which does not encourage them to express what they are keeping side. There is no time limit on Grief and several months down the road, families still do not feel “*normal*”. They are living a new normal. They have still lost their child and nothing will change that.
11. **Encourage bereaved parents to look after themselves.** To eat properly (it is not unusual for a bereaved person to stop eating and drinking), to see to their own needs and not to make any important decisions for a while. They need time to grieve and to heal.
12. **Remember that you are not responsible for this person's pain.** You didn't cause it and because your children are alive and healthy, try not to feel guilty about it.
13. **Remember you cannot take away their pain** but you can assist them over the rocky path. You can be supportive and caring. You will not have all of the answers and, often, there are no answers at all. Life happens with no apologies or excuses and sometimes, it can be quite unfair. They did nothing wrong to deserve this.
14. **It may be helpful to recommend professional counselling**, a physician, religious figure, grief counsellor or therapist. Libraries have books on death and dying and there are community workshops, seminars or support groups that can also be of assistance. Your local funeral home will also be able to guide you in this area.
15. **Chapters can support their bereaved families by donating Multiple Births Canada's Series of Loss Fact Sheets to all funeral homes in their Chapter area.** Funeral home personnel will better understand the complex ramifications of multiple-birth loss.
 - Visit our website below for a full listing of our Fact Sheets.

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