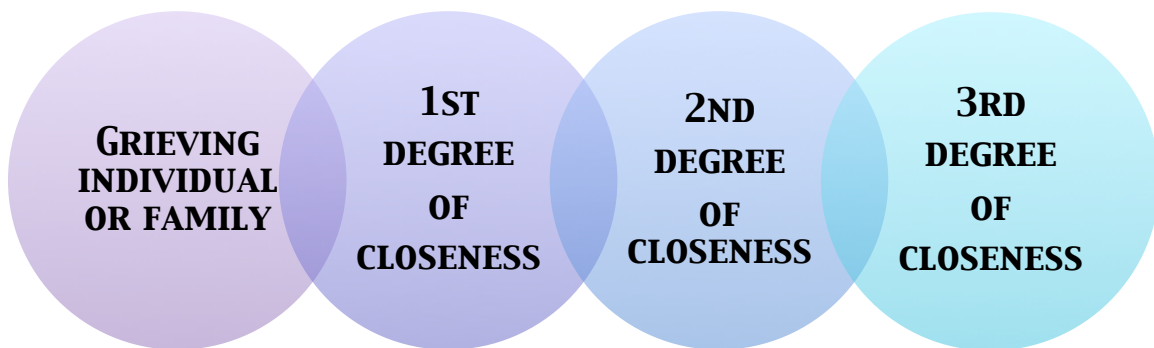


WHEN SOMEONE'S BELOVED CHILD DIES...

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?



Much of how you can help depends on your closeness to the parents and family, their desire for privacy, and the circumstances of the child's death. Here are some guidelines to help better understand ways that friends, colleagues, and community members can help:

1ST DEGREE OF CLOSENESS: THIS USUALLY INCLUDES PERIPHERAL FAMILY MEMBERS AND VERY CLOSE FRIENDS WHO KNOW THE PARENTS WELL AND WHO HAVE BEEN INTIMATE WITH THE FAMILY FOR SOME SIGNIFICANT PERIOD OF TIME PRIOR TO THE CHILD'S DEATH.

:::Show up nonjudgmentally and use words very carefully. Be mindful of the questions you ask as some may carry implications that may psychologically hurt family members. A silent, non-intrusive and supportive presence is a lasting gift during painful times like this:::

:::For now, focus on the core family and their experiences. Understandably, if you are close to the family, you (and others close to them) will have your own strong emotions of grief and sadness. When you return home, be sure to seek support for your own experience of the traumatic grief, and always remember that the forever-burden of this loss is something the family will always carry:::

:::If you are present during the acute crisis, make sure the primary focus is on the parents, siblings, and grandparents. Do as much as you can to protect the family from outsiders, the media, or medical staff who may not understand what happened or who may not be treating them with compassion. For example, if neighbors see emergency vehicles, some may try to ask questions or intrude on the scene. Usually law enforcement has the area cordoned off from these types of intrusions. However, if they don't, do all you can to protect the area. Another example is that when a child dies or is dying in the hospital, sometimes medical or general hospital staff are unaware. Stand near the door and make sure all who enter are sensitive to the needs of families. Make sure water and snacks are available at all

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times but don't push family members to drink or eat. You can even advocate for parent's right to see, hold, or touch their child who died should they choose this. Many families who do not engage in farewell rituals express later regret. Don't push them, of course; especially children. But do normalize seeing, holding, and touching (*in most circumstances*), and advocate for them should this be their choice:::

:::Wait, pause, before taking radical action to try to protect parents from their own justifiable and normal grief. Make sure that well-meaning friends and family do not take any actions related to the child who died without the parents' explicit consent. Also, make sure the parents understand what's being asked of them. For example, one mother whose one-year old baby died returned home from the hospital to find her son's room entirely packed into boxes and in her garage. Well-intending friends and family members thought it would be "too hard" for the family to return to her home with "reminders" of their son and brother. In an effort to help, someone asked the parents, "Should we clean Connor's room before you get home?" The parents, not fully understanding the question, assented. However, when they arrived home and saw that their son's physical artifacts were "virtually erased" from their home, they felt "retraumatized." Ask permission and be sure family members are presented with all their options:::

:::Provide practical help in ways that make sense for the culture of this family. Parents may have a harder time caring for surviving siblings under the weight of early grief and shock. If you are a trusted friend, spending time taking siblings to the park or to the movies gives grieving parents a chance to mourn without restraint, visit the cemetery, go to a yoga class or out for a quiet meal, or even have some quiet time to just be. You can also help organize, with the family's permission, a food-train. Be certain to provide meals that are appropriate for the family (vegan, gluten-free, vegetarian, ethnic appropriate) and assign different menus so they aren't eating potato casseroles every night for six months. Ask those delivering meals to leave them at the door and not to disturb the family unless they request visitors. Perhaps you can be there to receive the meals or someone can text a family member a simple message, "Food delivered at 1:10 pm":::

:::Remember their child today, tomorrow, and 20 years from now. As time passes, most people's lives go back to 'normal.' However, for this family, 'normal' has been forever changed. In the beginning after a loss, many people surround the family. Weeks and months later, few remember, few say their names, few are there for the family in the way they were in the immediate aftermath of this catastrophic loss. Remember with them. If dragonflies remind them of their child who died and you see a dragonfly, take a photo and send them a text. Make a donation, plant a tree, or send them a meaningful poem in their child's name on the anniversary of the

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child's death– not just on the one year- but five, ten, and 20 years later. The best way to show you care is to continue to, really and deeply, care:::

:::Continue to always see their child who died as part of the family- because he or she is part of the family. If parents have two living children and one child who died, then they have three children. Be mindful of that. Include their child/children who died in holidays and other rituals. For example, if you share holidays with the family and are bringing gifts for their children, offer a gift for their child who died which they can donate to help an underprivileged family. Or, you can offer a moment of silence to honor their child who died:::

:::When in doubt, ask. If you aren't sure if something is okay or not, ask. Sometimes, fear gets in the way of love. Pay attention to that fear and set it aside so you can – instead – deeply love and demonstrate compassion at all times. If you are uncertain about whether something is okay, ask:::

:::Help them find support when they are ready. Grief books [specific to traumatic grief](#) can be very helpful for families. Support groups, like the [MISS Foundation](#), Parents of Murdered Children, and Compassionate Friends, can help connect them to a larger network of like families. [Traumatic grief informed counselors](#) are hard to find and critically important. When – and if – they are ready, help secure the resources they need:::

2ND DEGREE OF CLOSENESS: SECOND DEGREE OF CLOSENESS INCLUDES CASUAL FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES WHO ARE NOT INTIMATELY CONNECTED BUT WHO HAVE A CARING RELATIONSHIP WITH ONE OR MORE FAMILY MEMBERS.

:::Offer practical support to the 1st degree supporters. Help the 1st degree supporters to help the family. You can do this by offering to coordinate food trains and taking their direction about family needs, degree of privacy, and even communication to the broader community about memorial and funeral services. Make sure the 1st degree supporter has food, water, and anything else he or she needs to be there for the family:::

:::Send a sensitive and appropriate condolence card to the family rather than making a phone call. You can also send cards months or years later if you are so moved and if you remember. Most families greatly appreciate when others remember their child who died. Be very careful with words and ditch all the platitudes like, “everything happens for a reason,” “you can have other children,” or “time heals all wounds.” Focus on expressing your compassion and your support rather than asking questions from the family:::

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:::Make a donation in honor of their child:::Ask first degree supporters what the family would most appreciate in honor of their child.

:::Do not push yourself into the 1st degree of supporters. However, it is okay to be available if the family asks because more support is needed:::

:::Encourage community members to provide gentle support without “guessing” about the circumstances of the child’s death. Try not to speculate about what happened and be very careful that community discussions do not turn into gossip about the family or circumstances of death:::

:::Do not visit the hospital, plan rituals or public ceremonies, or attend memorial or funeral services without the family’s – or 1st degree supporters- invitation or consent. Especially if the family has a high desire for privacy, this is their tragedy and their beloved child, and that should be respected. Some families have a high-need for privacy because it helps them feel safer during a tumultuous and traumatic time. Do all you can to show your respect and compassion without being assumptive or intrusive:::

3RD DEGREE OF CLOSENESS: THIRD DEGREE OF CLOSENESS KNOWS SOMEONE WHO KNOWS THE FAMILY BUT DOES NOT PERSONALLY KNOW ANY OF THE FAMILY MEMBERS.

:::Send a sensitive and appropriate condolence card to the family. You may send a card but its best not call the family. Most families greatly appreciate even when strangers remember their child and express empathy in response. Be very careful with words and ditch all the platitudes like, “everything happens for a reason,” “you can have other children,” or “time heals all wounds.” Focus on expressing compassion rather than asking questions from the family:::

:::Make a donation in honor of their child:::Choose something meaningful to the family. Consider a donation to a nonprofit, planting a tree, helping children or animals in need in honor of their child who died.

:::Do not speculate or talk about the family. They are going through enough without hearing that their community is speculating about the death of their child:::

:::Unless you’re invited to private events, only attend public events that have been sanctioned by the family or their 1st degree supporters. Do all you can to show your respect and compassion without being assumptive or intrusive:::