

How to support your friend after the death of their child

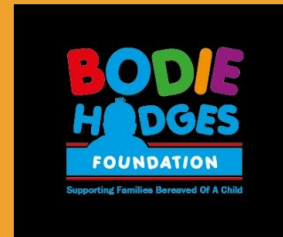
When a child dies it is so shocking and devastating it can be hard to find any words that feel “good enough” to say to the family, many people worry in case they say the wrong thing or make matters worse. However not avoiding the parents and family, acknowledging their loss and pain is the right thing to do. This can feel difficult but by making that phone call, sending that text, card or letter a bereaved friend will be grateful for your words and that you acknowledge their grief and the death of their child.

When you meet face to face for the first-time offering condolences again is helpful and shows your friend that they can express their feelings in your company. Speaking about their child, saying their child’s name, and sharing special memories can also be very comforting and supportive, often people avoid using the child’s name in fear of reminding the parents about the death. It is important to remember that bereaved parents never forget their child has died so you are not reminding them of their loss but keeping their child’s memory alive.

Understanding grief

Everyone grieves differently and there are no right and wrong ways to grieve the death of a loved one. Your friend will experience many different emotions which include shock, sadness, denial, anger, anxiety, depression. They can also have physical symptoms too such as difficulty sleeping, feeling fatigued, problems with digestion and lack of appetite. Grief emotions can change from one day to the next, being aware of this making allowance showing empathy and being supportive is important.

Listening to your friend and allowing them to express their emotions can be a great help, often we try to make people feel better by talking lots and filling silences. Be mindful how much you are talking in comparison to how much you are listening, as your friend will benefit from talking about their feelings and from you acknowledging their grief process with compassion. Do not be afraid to ask questions this allows your friend to talk openly about their child and share their emotions. Allowing your friend to cry is important, it can be tempting to try to cheer them up or tell them not to cry as we feel uncomfortable with the pain and discomfort we are witnessing however crying is an important part of expressing grief.



The best thing to offer a grieving friend is a hug and a listening ear and compassion. There are no words to make your friends pain go away, grief is all consuming being present and offering love and kindness is what matters , We cannot fix them or take their grief away, but we can stand beside them and support them.

Offer practical help

It can be difficult to navigate the normal tasks in life when you are grieving so offering practical help such as running errands, cooking, childcare, or cleaning can be a real benefit. Also checking in on your friend's self-care and how they are managing with eating sleeping and looking after themselves, sometimes just offering to go out for a coffee or a walk can be a good way to offer support.

Remembering

Your friend will appreciate you saying their child's name it is important to keep their memory alive and include them in special events as well as remembering important dates and reaching out at these times. This can bring great comfort in a time of great sadness, Birthdays, Christmas, and Anniversaries are all triggers for grief and can be extremely difficult for grieving parents. Sending cards and calling at these times shows you are thinking of them and their child at this this can help them not feel forgotten and lonely.

One of the most important things to remember is that you cannot make this better for your friend, but you can grieve alongside them. The death of a child changes a parent, and this can be hard for family and friends to accept, but with love and good communication you can support your friend in a way that is helpful to them and you.