



Supporting a friend after the death of a child

When a child dies, the shock and devastation are so profound that it can feel impossible to find words that seem “good enough.” Many people worry about saying the wrong thing or making the situation worse. But avoiding the parents or staying silent can feel far more painful for them. Acknowledging their loss—however imperfectly—is the right thing to do.

Reaching out with a phone call, text, card, or letter may feel daunting, but your friend will appreciate that you recognised their grief and the life of their child.

Meeting Them in Person

When you see your friend face to face for the first time, offering your condolences again can be comforting. It shows them that their feelings are welcome in your presence. Speaking about their child, using their child’s name, and sharing memories can be deeply supportive. Many people avoid mentioning the child for fear of “reminding” the parents of their loss, but bereaved parents never forget. Hearing their child’s name keeps their memory alive.



Understanding Grief

Grief is deeply personal, and there is no right or wrong way to experience it. Your friend may move through a wide range of emotions—shock, sadness, denial, anger, anxiety, depression—and these feelings can shift from day to day. Grief can also affect the body, causing fatigue, sleep difficulties, digestive issues, and loss of appetite.

Being aware of these changes and responding with empathy and patience is incredibly important.

Listening With Compassion

One of the most helpful things you can do is simply listen. Many of us try to fill silences or “fix” the pain, but your friend may benefit more from having space to talk about their feelings. Pay attention to how much you’re speaking compared to how much you’re listening.

Don’t be afraid to ask gentle questions—this can help your friend open up about their child and their emotions. Allowing them to cry is also important. It can be tempting to try to cheer them up, but crying is a natural and necessary part of grieving.

What You Can Offer

There are no words that can take away your friend’s pain. What matters most is your presence, your compassion, and your willingness to stand beside them. You cannot fix their grief, but you can walk with them through it.

Remembering Their Child

Using the child’s name and keeping their memory alive is deeply meaningful for bereaved parents. Remembering important dates — birthdays, anniversaries, holidays — and reaching out during those times can bring comfort during moments that are often especially painful.

Sending a card or making a call on these dates shows that you remember their child and that they are not alone.

Offering Practical Help

Everyday tasks can feel overwhelming when someone is grieving. Offering practical support—running errands, cooking meals, helping with childcare, or doing household tasks—can make a real difference.

Checking in on their basic self-care, such as eating and sleeping, can also be helpful. Sometimes suggesting a simple outing, like a walk or a coffee, provides gentle support without pressure.



Offering Practical Help

One of the most important things to remember is that you cannot make this better for your friend. The death of a child changes a parent forever, and this can be difficult for others to understand. But with love, patience, and open communication, you can support your friend in a way that honours their grief and strengthens your relationship.

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