



Things to Think About When Reaching Out to Bereaved Parents

DO'S

Do let your genuine concern and caring show.

Do be available to listen quietly and uncritically.

Do say you are sorry about what happened to their baby and about their pain. Admit your own helplessness and frustration. Cry if you feel like it.

Do allow them to express as much grief as they are feeling at the moment and are willing to share.

Do encourage them to be patient with themselves, not to expect too much of themselves, and not to impose any "shoulds" on themselves.

Do allow them to talk about their baby as much and as often as they want. This can have a very healing effect.

Do talk about the special, endearing qualities of their baby or their pregnancy.

Do give special attention to the baby's brothers and sisters at the funeral and in the months to come (they, too, are hurt and confused and in need of attention which their parents may not be able to give at this time).

Do reassure them that they did everything they could, that the medical care their baby received was the best or whatever else you know to be *true and positive* about the care given their baby.

Do mention the deceased child by name.

Do encourage parents to talk freely about their feelings and to be honest about what kind of help they really want from others.

ASK before you DO! Everyone's needs and desires are different. Be sure the kindness you plan to do is acceptable beforehand.

Remember the parents with a note or phone call on the birthday of death anniversary of the deceased child. Just say "I wanted you to know I was thinking of _____"

DON'TS

Don't let your own sense of helplessness keep you from reaching out to a grieving parent.

Don't avoid them because you are uncomfortable (being avoided by friends adds pain to an already intolerably painful experience).

Don't say you know how they feel unless you've lost a baby yourself.

Don't say "you ought to be feeling better by now" or anything else which implies a judgment about their feelings.

Don't tell them what they *should* feel or do. Feelings are never right or wrong - they just are!

Don't change the subject when they mention their dead baby.

Don't avoid mentioning the baby's name out of fear of reminding them of their pain (they haven't forgotten it!).

Don't try to find something positive (e.g. a moral lesson, closer family ties, etc.) about the baby's death.

Don't suggest it was "God's will" or "He needed their child". Parents will spiritualize their child's death on their own terms and time frame.

Don't say or imply "at least he was so little when you lost him; it would have been harder if he was older". Regardless of age, any loss is devastating.

Don't say they can always have another baby (even if they wanted to and could, another baby would not replace the baby who died).

Don't point out that at least they have their other children (children are not interchangeable; they cannot replace each other).

Don't suggest they should be grateful for their other children (grief over the loss of one child does not discount parents' love and appreciation of their living children).

Don't make any comments which suggest the care given their baby at home, in the emergency room, hospital, or wherever, was inadequate (grieving parents are plagued by feelings of doubt and guilt without any help from their family and friends).

Don't assume their grieving is over in a few weeks or even a few months. They will never stop grieving the loss of their child and may need your support for an indefinite period of time.

Information gathered from the Compassionate Friends