

The Bereaved Parent

- Do's & Don'ts



It will never be easy to know what to say and do when someone's child has died, however good our intentions may be. This list may help you avoid saying or doing something which will cause added distress.

Don't

- Please do not ignore the bereaved parent. Being avoided is very hurtful. Even though you may be doing it because you don't know what to say, it is isolating to be passed by in the street
- Don't say 'You'll get over it' or 'time is a great healer'. The death of a child cannot ever be got over, and it is not time that heals, but grief work done during that time
- Don't remind them that they have other children or that they can have other children. That is not any consolation or compensation for what has happened
- Don't say 'I know how you feel'; you don't!
- Don't say: 'He/she is in a better place'. If it was your child you would definitely not find any comfort in that sentiment
- Don't say 'God only takes the best', or 'The good die young' or any variation on this theme
- Don't say that such tragedies only happen to those who will be able to survive, (so the bereaved is a special person chosen to suffer)
- Don't say 'I don't know how you cope' – there's not always a choice
- Don't talk about the time your pet died – or the death of an elderly relative
- Don't say 'don't cry' / 'don't be angry' etc – feelings are valid
- Don't mention gardens in heaven, or other trite sentiments

Do

- Do talk about the child that has died – it is extremely hurtful to the bereaved parent if they think that everyone else has forgotten their child
- Do ask how they are feeling – but only if you are prepared to really listen to the answer
- Do find out if there is anything practical you can do to help
- Do come alongside the person in their grief. Sometimes being there is enough without having to talk or act. There are few people willing to sit with someone in their pain
- Do stay around for the long haul, not only for the first few months
- Do remember special birthdays and anniversaries

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