

CHOOSE HOPE - How can you help?

It's challenging to know how to help a family experiencing grief. Here are things that may be helpful:

1. **Listen but don't push:** Grief is confusing. The loss of a child is not openly talked about, not overly understood so it can be difficult to navigate. Allow mom & family members time to talk but also allow her the space if she doesn't want to talk about it. Be willing to sit in silence. Be with her and offer your ear (or your eyes if she would rather write you). Only say it if you mean it or quote encouraging scripture. We need people to listen.
2. **Be mindful of what you say:** We all know that people are honestly good and trying to help so don't beat yourself up if you have said the "wrong thing" or will say it. It's better to be present than to back off worrying you will say the wrong thing. Just be mindful that you don't minimize what the family is going through. Don't say you understand if you've never been there. Be honest and say you don't know what she's going through {if you don't} but that you are there for her.
3. **Pray!** And let them know that you are praying.
4. Send a card or gift. **Acknowledging the child's life and the family's grief are essential to loving on them well.** You don't need to find something profound to say; nothing fixes it. Quote scripture, tell them you love them, pray for them.
5. **Gifts** are encouraging. Jewelry with the child's name on it, plaques, coffee, tea, bubble bath, books, music... anything that essentially states: "We love you. We want to help."
6. Live **plants** are more encouraging than cut flowers. Give them something that grows. (But flower arrangements are always nice too.)
7. Providing **tangible support** is huge. There are so many responsibilities that weigh on a person, and it's nearly impossible to attend to them during the grieving process. Ask them what tangible thing would be most helpful, and give them options: Make meals. Babysit their children. Clean their house. Do laundry. Get the car cleaned/serviced. Buy groceries.
8. Death is tragically **expensive**. Parents do not plan on having funeral expenses. Maybe the family has had to go to a medical facility outside of their area and incurred travel costs. Support them financially. Locally, French Family Funeral Home offers free services for families who've lost children.
9. Provide for **emotional breaks** – something that will distract. Rent lighthearted movies. Buy a frozen pizza. Give the mom a pedicure coupon. Offer a vacation home for a few days. Buy them a hotel room for a weekend.
9. **Send texts, emails, and Facebook messages.** "I love you and am thinking of you," is encouraging. It lets your friend know that you haven't forgotten & that what they are going through and their loss has not been forgotten. Responding through email or text gives them the space to respond when it is a better time while letting them know that you care.
10. **Refer to support:** If you have not been through the loss of a child or you are not in a good space to be able to support your friend it is always okay to refer them to someone. If you have another friend who has been through it or you can connect your friend to a support group offer that information to your friend. It is still important that you are a support for your friend as well, but sometimes it can be beneficial to connect to someone who has been there as well.

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11. **Remember, remember, remember.** It's discouraging when it seems like the rest of the world keeps going, and you're stuck. Remember the date of the child's birth/death. Acknowledge the hard days. Continue to ask them how they're doing, months afterward.
12. Never be afraid to ask them, "**How can I love you best?**"
13. **Be patient / Understand circumstances:** She has been through something traumatic and life changing – no matter how far along the pregnancy was or how soon after birth she lost her child or if the child was older. Don't expect her to be over it right away if it is 'affecting her longer then you think it should be'. Try to be understanding of certain circumstances. If you are pregnant try to understand if she is being distant since her loss. It can be hard to support and grieve at the same time. It is important to give her that space to try to figure out those two very conflicting situations, but don't just assume she wants space. Communicate.
14. Don't forget that family gatherings, birthdays, **holidays** such as Christmas & Easter can be very challenging for a family who has lost a child. Be extra sensitive during this time and ask if there is something that family would appreciate to make these experiences easier.
15. Be supportive should the family choose to **honour their child** in some way (ie. plant a tree, continue to celebrate the child's birthday as a day of remembrance, have a balloon release, donate towards a charity, create a special Christmas ornament or tradition, host a special family event, etc....). Honouring a child can be very therapeutic and a way to celebrate the child's life. They will always be part of your family story, so it's appropriate to want to celebrate their life.
16. Don't forget that there may be **other children** who are grieving as well. Other siblings and close family/friends may exhibit grief with behaviour changes and anxiety. Be patient and provide emotional breaks, times of fun and seek assistance or advice if needed.

Some ideas taken from <http://hopemommies.org/friends> and www.unspokengrief.com

Pregnancy and Infant Loss Network - PAIL - www.pailnetwork.ca - Ontario support and resources for making a positive difference to those affected by pregnancy and infant loss. They offer resources, counseling, education for medical professionals, and support groups. Call them at 1-888-301-7276.

Hope Mommies - www.hopemommies.org - a US organization that offers online support and resources for family and friends.

LOCALLY:

Hope Boxes - Free resources for Northern Ontario families experiencing pregnancy and infant loss to give them support, healing and hope.

To find out more contact: **Pastor Pete & Jenita Naylor Riverside Community Church**

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