



Jewish Board of Family
and Children's Services, Inc.



Suggestions from Bereaved Parents: Ten 'Commandments' for the Community

The death of a child is a horrible tragedy, which challenges not only the parents and family but the whole community. Many people have given sensitive care and support to bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings, but others, in not knowing how to respond, have added to the suffering and come up short. What follows are some suggestions for how to be of help:

1. We are individuals. We are as different from one another as any other group of people. Please remember this and consider our particular strengths and challenges, needs and desires, resources and obstacles, personalities and histories.
2. Please listen to us, and contact us when you want/need to hear from us. We'll tell you if we can't talk about it, or need to change the subject. Don't hesitate to ask us what we need, in general.
3. Please don't compare losses. Yes, ours is beyond words, off-the-charts, out-of-sync, etc., but we neither want our grief minimized nor to discount anyone else's suffering or bereavement.
4. Please don't try to explain our loss. We don't need or want for our story to be made palatable, digestible, or acceptable. If you have a spiritual or moral understanding of this horror and emptiness, consider whether it is good to share that with us.
5. Use our child's name. Hearing it may be painful, but it can also be a gift, it is also a testament, an opportunity for us to remember our beautiful child with others.
6. There is no 'clock' for grief, no one-size-fits-all schedule for bereavement. You may be surprised by our having a good day, or shocked at a sudden plunge in our spirits. Please know that we are not mentally ill; we are grieving.
7. We know there are mental health professionals, clergy, and others with professional experience related to the death of a child. But the only true experts are those who have been there, who know this journey first-hand. Please monitor your advice-giving.
8. We will never be 'unbereaved.' Please don't use words like 'acceptance,' 'moved on,' 'gotten over,' and the like. Our child will never be replaced, and we want to remember his/her unique soul forever. It is OK – in fact, imperative – that we never pretend to fill his/her shoes in our lives.
9. Don't 'drop' us. Please don't cross the street when you see us coming, or avoid us at communal gatherings. We need to be a part of the living community, and we need your help with that.
10. And don't think we don't want to see your children, hug them, hear about their achievements, see them smile or laugh, whine or complain. Yes, it may be hard, but we want a world full of children, the healthier the better.

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