



Responding to Grief in Your Community

Every community is touched by grief at some point. When tragedy touches close to home, it is normal to feel shocked, upset, and helpless. There is often a desire for a community to rally together and take action in support of the impacted family or families, but it can be hard to know what to do when you do not know the grieving family well. Here are some thoughts on how to respond when grief touches a family in your broader community.

Pause and Check In With Yourself

It is understandable to be alarmed, curious, and upset when something extraordinary happens. When we hear of a family experiencing grief or tragedy, it makes us feel vulnerable and that is scary. It also throws us into grief that we were not prepared for and do not know how to reconcile. Take a moment to recognize all of the different emotions that you are feeling in response to this news. Your pain and fear are real and acceptable, even if they are surprising to you or if you feel they are undeserved because you do not know the family well. *These feelings are yours to hold and share with your close friends and loved ones*; do not attempt to reach out to the family or those close to them for information or reassurance that what happened to them cannot happen to you. You may feel a strong urge to help in some way. Know that helping directly may not be possible and that is okay.

Honor and Uphold Boundaries

This will be an overwhelming time for the impacted family. Limit your offers of condolences and support to times when the family is prepared to receive them - like at a funeral, viewing, or vigil. Help your children understand that their classmate may not want to be asked about the death during the school day. This is an opportunity to empower your child in helping a grieving person control as much of their own experience as possible. If you see the impacted family out and about in your community, resist the urge to approach them if you have never spoken to them before. If you cannot resist the urge to offer support, keep it simple and brief like "I am keeping you and your family in my thoughts." Release any expectations you may have for the family to respond to you in a certain way.



Be Specific and Concrete

If you are close enough to the family to offer help, try to offer something concrete that may be necessary and that releases the family from feeling pressure over when and how to ask for help. Avoid saying "If you need anything let me know." Think about making offers like "I am available all summer and am happy to mow your lawn if you would like" or "I go to the grocery store every Friday and can pick up and drop off anything you might be out of" followed by a clear way for them to communicate back to you, like an email address or a cell number to text, if they would like to accept your help.

Consider the Long-term

In the period of time immediately following a death, a family will be inundated with offers of concern and support. In the months or even years following the death, that support will wane and the family may feel isolated or invisible even if they are still deeply grieving. Mark your calendar with a reminder to send a card of kindness and support after some time has passed. Just knowing that their grief and their loved one are not forgotten can be meaningful for families.

Help the Helpers

You may be close to people who are more directly supporting the grieving family. Offering support to those helpers is a beautiful way to indirectly support the impacted family. The helpers will be up close to the grief and pain, and will need a place to be heard and process their own feelings. They may also be in need of some basic assistance so that they can continue to support the grieving family; remember to be specific and concrete in your offers to help them.

You are not in this alone. We are here as a resource to you, your team, and your community.

Please contact us for more information, let us know how we can best support you.

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