

How to Help Grieving Parents

You cannot do everything to help, but you can do something. We're all gifted and geared to help in different ways. If we simply do what we're able to do and trust others to do the same, we'll help in huge ways.

- Know that you cannot make it all better or take the pain away. You can't fix everything, but you can share the burden by simply being available and offering your humble friendship.
- Help make travel arrangements for family coming into town. Offer to shuttle people to and from the airport, lend an extra car to family flying into town, or reserve a block of rooms at a comfortable, convenient, affordable hotel.
- Help family keep services simple. Alleviate the pressure they feel by letting them know it's okay to pick one or two elements that are important to them then let someone they trust decide some of the other details and logistics. Caution them that people will say many well-intentioned things, and some of them will sting. Encourage them to set those aside as soon as they hear them and cling to the words that are powerful and helpful. Remind them that they set the pace for the services. If they need to step out while people are greeting them and giving their condolences, that's okay. If they need to sit, that's okay. They are not expected to be superhuman.
- Take food to the family, but not too much too quickly. Find out what they have and decide the best options, depending on when family will be there, if there are kids around, what is easy to serve, reheat, and store. Arrange meals for 4-12 weeks following funeral services but only 2-3 times a week. People usually make more than is needed, so there will be leftovers on the days between deliveries. The food is only part of the reason for arranging meals; regular contact from people is good, even if it's only for a moment when someone drops off the meal. Use a free service such as MealTrain.com to help coordinate sign-ups, what people bring, etc. Be sure to ask for dislikes, allergies, and food restrictions. Suggest people take food in containers that do not have to be returned when possible. Keeping track of everyone's dishes and returning them are one more thing grieving parents shouldn't need to worry about.
- Offer to help with clothes the parents might need for the services. Take a suit to the dry cleaners or offer to shop for shoes or jewelry. It's good to have someone with parents as they go out and about in the community the first few times.
- Offer to clean the house.

- Offer to help with flowers after the services. They might not want them all in the house as reminders and responsibilities. Deliver them to area assisted living or homeless shelter residents or others who might appreciate them.
- Help with thank you notes a week or two after funeral services. You can offer to customize thank you cards, address envelopes, organize what needs to be written to whom (thanks for meals, flowers, memorial gift, etc.), buy postage, or mail all the notes.
- Run basic errands for or with parents. They sometimes need company, or they might need you to simply pick up a few things so they don't have to venture into public yet. Take cues from them. Don't push. Let them set the pace and agenda, and be willing to change plans as they need to.
- Consider the parents' interests and offer to do something with them. Build something, fix something, create something, go for a walk or drive.
- Refrain from giving simple answers. Even if you're well-intentioned and what you're saying is true, it might not be the right words at the right time. If you're confident you're supposed to share something, you might want to add, "I intend this to be helpful, but I realize I don't completely understand what you're going through, so if what I say isn't helpful, just set it aside for now."
- Be available to simply hang out. And leave when it's time.
- Check in often but don't take it personally if you get pushed aside.
- Find reliable support and counseling services and pass the contact information along, yet give space for the parents to respond in their own timing.